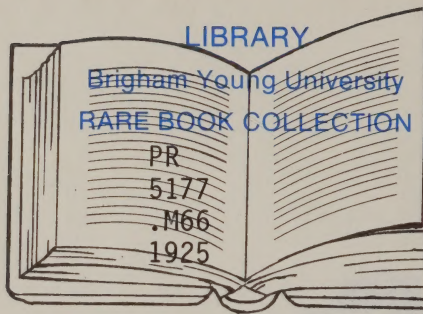




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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY



THE MONSTER

BY
HARRINGTON HEXT

NUMBER 87
THE THING AT THEIR HEELS
WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?

THE MONSTER

BY
HARRINGTON HEXT

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THE MONSTER

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CHAPTER I

OVER the cliffs they came through the nightly loneliness with their hearts full of one another. To the west a sickle moon glittered on the dusky green sunset, while southward, where the precipices fell, there ascended whispers from the sea. Immediately ahead the cliff line broke and in the valley beneath twinkled out earth-born lights upon the darkness of a scattered haven. Hither, through the still November evening, descended presently the boy and girl, linked in immemorial fashion with her head on his shoulder, his arm about her waist. They moved unconscious of all things but themselves, for their romance had culminated within that hour, and when, afar off behind Golden Cap, the red sun was sinking, Phyllis Bellhanger had whispered "yes" to Richard Rivers and promised to marry him.

She was a tall, fair maiden with pale hair and grey eyes. Her expression libelled her heart, for something questioning and pensive belonged to it, whereas in truth Phyllis possessed a joyful soul and inherited from her father courage and common sense, from her mother content and patience.

Perhaps her sweetheart knew this, for now, looking forward, he mentioned both these virtues.

"You'll have to be plucky and you'll have to keep your nerve and not hope for Mr. Bellhanger to agree very quick," said Richard.

He was a big fellow, stood six feet two and had won more renown for speed and strength than industry. Dick's fame as a great cricketer and football player stood high in West Haven; but George Rivers, his parent, despised the youth, because Richard would not put away childish things and enter seriously into the business of living. This fact, too, he voiced, in slow, agreeable accents.

"As for my father, if he's honest he ought to welcome this great news. He's always at me to be a man and chuck sport. Well, now he'll hear I have been a man—so manly in fact that I've got the finest girl in all Dorset to marry me. He ought to be darned proud of me, Phyllis."

Richard was dark as night with a permanent scowl upon his handsome face; but the expression, even as the melancholy of his sweetheart's countenance, did not reflect his nature. He was blessed with a healthy, hearty spirit and, so far as any man might say, revealed no vice beyond a fiery temper. He sulked a little sometimes, yet the discipline of sport went far to break down a native disposition to harbour grievances; and many a father might have been gratified at the man's uncommon skill in popular pastimes. But Mr. George Rivers, of "The Blue Peter" Hotel, hated sport and, in that one vital quarter, Richard's excellencies were wasted.

"It's not going to be very plain sailing for us and we won't pretend that it is," said Phyllis, as they reached the edge of the downs and descended. "To begin with, my father doesn't like your father, because he won't give way about the Red Field."

"It's only a matter of cash. Father would give way if Mr. Bellhanger would meet him over the price."

The girl considered.

"I'm not so sure; but if that is so, I doubt whether my father knows it. I've heard him say he fears it must be a personal thing."

"Not a bit. A little give and take might do the trick."

"Then hope looks brighter," declared Phyllis, "for though I've never heard father name you, he likes a bit of sport and he wouldn't think the worse of you for being a great sportsman."

"He doesn't know we've been keeping company?"

"I expect he does. Mother does. She'll be on our side. Mother and father have no secrets from each other, so I reckon she's told him. But he's never said a word against."

"That's to the good, then. Anyway, we'll know how I stand in half an hour, for I'm coming home with you to tell him this minute."

"You brave thing!"

"Yes," admitted Dick. "I'm brave, even if there isn't much more to me than that. Since you said 'yes,' Phyllis, I've seen what you may call a great light. You love me, and a chap that's

loved by you has got to take himself serious. I do think I can make good with your father and satisfy him presently that I'm worthy of you—as far as any man can be worthy of such a wonder. And your mother's friendly, too, you say? But the trouble for me will be at home. My father doesn't like me and I won't pretend he does."

"Why not? Why shouldn't he?"

"Because just the things I shine at are all rubbish to father. When Mr. Falconer, captain of the Wessex County Cricket Club, asked me to be a professional cricketer and throw in my lot with the county, father very near had a fit. I've seldom seen him in such a rage. He said that to make such an offer to a son of his was like giving him a punch on the jaw! And he rounded on me furious and told me it was a disgrace for a Rivers to give his time and wits to a game, and that I'd soon find I was going to pay a long price for my laziness and worthlessness."

"Well, you can be an amateur. There's no disgrace to playing cricket, surely?"

"He thinks there is. He says no grown man ought to be seen playing a game. Golf's a scandal to England, father thinks."

Richard's scowl became accentuated.

"The old fool wants me to be a lawyer, of all God-forsaken trades!"

"Whatever for?"

"Because my grandfather was a lawyer of sorts. A pettifogger in Bridetown, who scraped money together and died rich and hated. And father says lawyering is better than inn-keeping and a

higher trade. The family is a small one now and I'm the last of it. There's only father and Uncle Pat, the vet, and Aunt Sarah at Yeovil. But father quarrelled with her ages ago, because she married beneath her, he says. She's a childless widow now, with a lot of money, and he's made it up with her. He fell out with her for marrying and he fell out with Uncle Pat for not marrying; but he's friendly enough with Uncle Pat now-a-days—in fact, he thinks a very great deal more of him than he does of me."

"And you're friendly with your uncle?"

"Oh, yes. He's a rare good friend and has often calmed down father when we've had a worse row than usual. Father thinks very well of Uncle Pat because he's calm and never loses his temper or flies into rages at things, like he does himself. We've got my uncle on our side, be sure; and if we can get Mr. Bellhanger, also, it ought to be all right."

"It will be," declared Phyllis. "With our love for each other, it must come right, Dick. But you'll have to turn to, of course—else your father won't be on your side. Must it be the law if you hate it? Mr. Rivers—so father says—is about the snuggest man in West Haven, so he ought to find a bit to start you."

"I'd have liked engineering, but it's too late. I'm twenty-four and they say you must begin that as a lad. But father will be for a profession—what he calls a 'learned profession.' However, he's got to hear you presently, same as your father is going to hear me now. It ought to be a tower

of strength to me when father finds I could win such a girl as you."

"I'll try to make him a friend, I'm sure."

Thus hopefully they descended into the hamlet, then turned, where the road across the little bay branched north, and climbed a hill to the maiden's home. It stood inland but three hundred yards from the white beach—an ancient farmstead with its lands running to the east and one wide, south-facing field falling from the farm-yard to the strand below.

Richard spoke of this field as they neared Monks Barton, the ancient habitation of the Bellhangers.

"Did you ever hear the old yarn about it? That was before our time, but I've heard Uncle Pat say that a hundred years ago it was called the 'Red Field,' because it had been the price of blood. A man told on a murderer and gave his pal to justice; and the field was his reward; and the story goes that everything he ever planted in it came up blood red!"

"All I know is that my father wants the ground more than he wants anything in the world, and I hope that Mr. Rivers doesn't mean to deny him."

They were home again, and Mrs. Bellhanger, at sound of their voices, stood still with the teapot in her hand.

"Just in time," she said.

Mary Bellhanger was a comely woman with character and good sense in every line of her face. Phyllis resembled her mother and both were fair. The matron showed patience and self-control as her prime virtues. Her very voice, in its balanced

and steady intonation, indicated a mind of even quality. Her grey eyes were kindly and humour did not lack from her mouth. Beside the fire, smoking his pipe, sat the master of Monks—a tall, stout man with a big moustache, turning grey, short grey hair and a round red face. For all his size there was no coarseness about him. At fifty-three years of age Michael Bellhanger still found himself tough, healthy and capable of a heavy day's work. He looked up with a twinkling eye as the young people entered, for this little matter was no surprise to him. He had waited for it to happen and was glad that the promised understanding had at last been reached. Certain interests of his own hung upon it.

Mrs. Bellhanger bade them come to the table and Richard broke his great news at once.

“I expect this is going to come as a proper eye-opener to you, ma'am,” he began, addressing the mother of his sweetheart; “but there it is—Phyllis and I have found out what we mean to one another, and I do hope and pray you and the master are going to allow our engagement. No hurry, of course, but we love each other in a way that's a good bit out of the common, I reckon, and there's only one thing wanting to make us the happiest couple on earth, and that is that you and Mr. Bellhanger agree to it.”

The familiar frown settled on his face and Michael Bellhanger commented upon it.

“Needn't look so hang-dog, Dick. You haven't committed a crime. Perhaps this ain't the knock-out you fancy, for us middle-aged folk have still

got eyes in our heads, though you youngsters all think we're blind. But there's a little more to this bargain than you might guess."

He rose, went to the window and drew up the white blind. It flashed up with a spring. Night was upon the earth, but the sky twinkled with many stars. Over a receding foreground fell the ten acres of the "Field of Blood."

"Whose ground is that, Dick?" asked the farmer.

"My father's, Mr. Bellhanger."

"And whose was it? Perhaps you don't know; but I can tell you. It belonged to my father, Nicholas Bellhanger, in his youth; but when he came into Monks he had to follow a thriftless farmer who'd picked the eyes out of the farm and let it go downhill. Nicholas was faced with great difficulties and to meet 'em he had to mortgage that meadow. And your grandfather it was—Lawyer Rivers, lawyer at Bridegate—who arranged his affairs for him. I'll say nothing about the dead and only give you the facts. Taking advantage of some confusion over dates, Mr. Abraham Rivers foreclosed on that field a week before my father thought he was due to pay back his debt. That's all done and we needn't share the anger of dead men, or echo the hard words that passed between them; but how do we stand now? We stand thus. The field was left by your grandfather to your father. It's owned by Mr. George Rivers today and I want to buy it back, so that it may belong again where it always rightfully belonged. And why not? Your father's a pub-

lican, not a farmer. He doesn't keep stock, and farming don't interest him. He only makes hay every year and sells it. Then why for not let me have the Monks field back for Monks?"

"Every reason why you should have it," replied Richard. "I heard my Uncle Patrick say only a week ago you ought to have it."

"Well, then, what about it? Why does Mr. Rivers hold out against me? There must be a reason."

"I know of none, Mr. Bellhanger. But since we're talking of my father, I'll tell you the truth. He doesn't like me. He hates sport and he's at me to go up to London and learn to be a lawyer. Of course, now I'm engaged to marry Phyllis, I must take life seriously, but——"

"You're not engaged to marry Phyllis yet, my son. These fine things take a little thinking about. I don't quarrel with you for being a sportsman, and I've often had a good bit of pleasure to see you make a score at cricket, because a prettier bat, with a finer natural style, I don't know in the county; and there's no doubt you'd be up to county form if you played in first-class company for a season. But that's all by the question. You stand thus. Life's a matter of give and take, and if all's right about you, and you can satisfy me that you are going to make a good husband for Phyllis presently, that's half the battle. I'll pleasure you there if my missis says ditto, for she'll have the casting vote, I warn you. But then comes in my side. We'll suppose your father's no fool and will understand that for his son to win

my girl is a good stroke of luck. We needn't mince speech. You know she's my only one and that, when her mother and myself are gone, Monks is hers. So that's all right from the worldly point of view. And that being so, it's up to George Rivers, in my opinion, to do his share. Some men, I daresay, would make your necessity their opportunity and tell you and your father short and sharp that the match hung on yonder field. 'No field, no wedding,' many a parent would say; and I shouldn't blame the man who did. But I won't do that—for why? Because you, too, are an only child, and if you do your duty by your father, no doubt, in time to come, he'll do his duty by you. Therefore, I'll be very willing to pay the proper market price for the Red Field. That's fair—eh, mother?"

Mrs. Bellhanger considered.

"Can Dick's father show any good reason why the field shouldn't come back to you?" she asked.

"There's no reason on earth why it shouldn't," declared Dick; "and, what's more, my father wouldn't deny it. I believe it's only a question of price with him. And I'll move in the matter right away, Mr. Bellhanger."

"I don't know anything against you, Dick; but then I don't know anything for you either, and I can't quite take Phyllis as the best judge," said Mary, smiling at the young man. "So let's see where we are. Master doesn't make any promises yet, you understand, and for my part I don't want to hear the field and the engagement between you and Phyllis named in the same breath. They may

or may not hang upon each other and I quite see my husband's point of view—him being the soul of justice. But let's get the field out of hand first. We want the field and certainly ought to have it. Unfortunately your father doesn't like Mr. Bellhanger—the only man in West Haven that don't to my knowledge. But he don't, for some reason, and that complicates it. All the same in the way of business you've often got to meet folk you don't like for themselves. So if your father's willing to sell Red Field, as you say he is, and Michael's willing to buy it, being the right and proper person to do so, then let Mr. Rivers get on with it and name his price. That done you'll be in a strong position, and you've only got to buckle to and face life and make good to win us for your friends."

"Very well spoke, as usual," said Mr. Bellhanger. "I see your point, Polly, for never was such a fair-minded woman. You argue that it didn't ought to be a bargain, and that the welfare of these two young blades mustn't depend upon Dick's cranky father?"

"That's how I see it, Michael."

"And I'm mighty glad you do, ma'am," added Richard, "because my father's a parlous difficult sort of chap, as you know. He's prosperous and makes plenty of money, but he hasn't the art to make friends as well. He's a secret sort of man—however, I don't like him, or understand him, and he don't like or understand me. So we'll leave him out. I'll do what I can to force his hand over the field. Anyway, I'll learn, if it's in my power,

why he hangs back. And this I very well know—that he's got no shadow of reason for his attitude to people. He's honest, no doubt, but he ought to understand that other folk are as honest as himself. But I'll keep shut about—about Phyllis till, as you say, the field is settled."

They talked of Richard.

"It's very large-minded of you to be friends with me," he said frankly. "I wish to God my father was like you, Mr. Bellhanger. But I've got Uncle Patrick, the veterinary: he's well addicted to me. He wants for me to be a farmer; but father's got no use for that. He don't like farmers."

"Who do he like?" asked Phyllis.

"Black coats," answered Richard. "He's all for lifting yourself up in the world. He wants me to go among them—where the money is, he says. He might put down money for a show in one of the Bridegate rope factories; but the law runs in his head. He's got it in his blood—always splitting straws and arguing about every damned thing."

"I wonder the people go in his public house," said Mrs. Bellhanger; but her husband explained that.

"It's his liquor, not him, draws 'em. Nobody gives value for money like he does. And that always pays well, as it ought to do."

Presently Richard went his way and descended the little hill to his home. "The Blue Peter" stood immediately beneath him, and close at hand was the railway station, whence ran a loop to

Bridegate, two miles inland, and the main line beyond. Very bright and smart shone the inn, or "hotel," as Mr. Rivers preferred to hear it called. Gilt sparkled on the upper rails of the first-storey windows; the public bar shone resplendent; the inn sign, with a "Blue Peter" waving upon it, was repainted every second year.

To the west stretched the little township, with shops, villas and bungalows extending in a line parallel to beach and sea. Then the river flowed out through wide water meadows into the harbour, and between the mouths of the twin piers small coasters came and went, bringing and taking their cargoes.

Of old time, before railways, the place had been more prosperous, when the ropes and cables, cordage and twines of Bridegate went off by sea; but now the port was sunk to a small pleasure resort and its industry had become much reduced.

One building stood to celebrate the former extended activities—a huge storehouse that rose five storeys high between "The Blue Peter" and the beach. The great pile lifted its ruined and ragged crest against the sky, and as Richard passed close at hand, his scowl deepened and his shoulders lifted in something like a shudder while he passed out from the darkness of the mass. It seemed to brood sinister on the night—the largest building in the haven and the only one that opened no friendly eye of fire to twinkle through the darkness.

The young man hesitated before his home, then passed on to the harbour. It was one thing to

talk of tackling his father on the subject of the Red Field, but quite another thing actually to do so. He found himself as yet not strung up to the task. Enmity ruled his breast against George Rivers. Here was he, a triumphant lover, living through the greatest day of his life; and well he knew that no smile, no word of good cheer or congratulation, would reach him when his father heard the news. Such was the situation, in fact, that Mr. Rivers must not hear it, for he might surely oppose an active will to the project and forbid Dick's engagement on pain of punishment if he insisted.

"I'll go to Uncle Pat," thought Richard. "He'll be glad, anyway; and he'll know how best to advise me."

CHAPTER II

THE veterinary surgeon lived in a small house to the west of the river. He was a hard-working member of his trade, but ability in his business, as often happens with more important men than himself, had been discounted by disability in other directions. Mr. Patrick Rivers did not lack urbanity, but though gracious and kindly at heart by comparison with his brother, the host of "The Blue Peter," a certain shortness and dryness in his relations with his fellow men served to handicap him. It was unfortunate, for behind this manner lay a will to friendship and the desire to serve, and personal unsucccess had not made a cynic of the man. He hid his bruised heart. Nor was he without friends, and those who ignored the rind appreciated the good sense and sound judgment within. Mr. Rivers was trustworthy; and it happened that only a fortnight before the meeting with his nephew now to be recorded, the veterinary surgeon had received gratifying and unexpected proof that he was appreciated.

It had cheered him and made him think deeply. He sat partaking of a meat tea—his last serious meal for the day—when Richard entered his little parlour. There was no formality between them and the young man pushed into his uncle's house

without knocking, for he knew himself very welcome there.

In person, Mr. Rivers had nothing to commend him save a pair of brown and kindly eyes, which saved his clean-shaven face and indeterminate nose and hard mouth and chin from meanness. He was growing a little bald, though his hair was still dark. He lacked his nephew's inches, but appeared powerful still and straight in the back, though a man of fifty-two.

"Wish me luck, Uncle Pat," said Richard. "I've won her—Phyllis Bellhanger. She's going to marry me—some day!"

"I do, then—all the luck going. Though there don't look to be much going now-a-days. Do her people know?"

"Just come from them on to you. You've got to do your bit for me, Uncle Pat. It's not all over bar shouting yet by any means."

Mr. Rivers drank the remains of his tea; then rose, produced a pipe, took his arm-chair and stretched gaitered legs to the fire. He spoke with his eyes upon the flame and appeared to be thinking aloud rather than addressing Richard.

"A Rivers will mate with a Bellhanger, after all, then," he said. But the other was ignorant of the allusion.

"I hope so. But something has got to happen first. In fact, a good few things. I haven't told father yet. I knew it would be more to you than him."

"Why shouldn't he be pleased?"

"Only because nothing I ever do pleases him."

Besides, there's a sort of condition. I don't mean exactly that Mr. Bellhanger will insist, but I do see it will make a lot of difference to his feeling about the engagement if father can meet him over Red Field. Of course, I can't talk to father about it, or about anything else, for he thinks I'm a fool and no idea of mine worth listening to. But I've come to you, Uncle Pat, to lend a hand here, because father does attach importance to your judgment and thinks, as everybody else does, that you're a wise man."

The elder shook his head.

"Not many give me that credit; but it's true that your father does. I know that. And you want me to get busy about the field? Well, you may be interested to hear that I have it in mind already—not on your account, but your father's."

"So much the better; but why?"

"Because it's a perfectly right and reasonable thing to happen."

"So Mr. Bellhanger made clear. The field was part of Monks once, and only my grandfather foreclosing——"

"Quite true. I know all about it, and so does your father. He's got his own reasons for holding off; but they are not very sound reasons, and if I can only bring them together in a friendly spirit the land will change hands. So at least I hope. If I can get it down to a question of cash, then it will go through, and neither your father nor Michael Bellhanger is a grasping man."

"Mr. Bellhanger isn't. I don't know about father."

"You don't know much about your father, and that's a fact," said Patrick, blowing a wreath of grey smoke from his lips. "But if you're going to marry Phyllis Bellhanger, you've got to know your father a good bit better, and he's got to know you better. You can't marry on nothing, and so far, Dick, that's all there is to you."

"I'm the governor's only son and he ought to come to an understanding with me."

"An understanding—yes. But that will involve an undertaking, too. You must work and put away childish things—what your father calls childish things, anyway."

"I mean to. I'd begin tomorrow; and if father had only seen eye to eye with me—and you—I'd have begun long ago—on the land. You can help me there, too, if you will, Uncle Pat, and I shan't fail in gratitude, I promise you. You know what I mean."

The other nodded.

"Yes, I know very well what you mean, because I went through much the same experience. My father wanted me to go into his office and be a lawyer, and my soul rebelled, for I'd got the instinct and love of animals that made me what I am. But he never forgave me, and because I asserted myself, he left me out of his will and divided his riches between your father and your aunt. And now, in his turn, your father wants you to be a lawyer, like your grandfather—with this difference: he's hard, but not so cruel hard as your grandfather was. I do think, if you take up

decent work and stick to it, that your father in time will be content."

"But he hates farming and that's the only thing I'll ever be any good at. For the minute I feel no hope of father. That's why I come to you. If you can only exercise your influence with father and get him to sell the field to Mr. Bellhanger, then I should have the Bellhangers on my side."

Mr. Rivers considered.

"You haven't told your father yet?"

"No."

"Well, Dick, I shouldn't tell him—not for the moment. For this reason. If he knows your game and, on the top of that, the Red Field crops up again, he'll say Bellhanger is holding a pistol to his head and very likely back out altogether. He'll be against marriage for you, anyhow, yet awhile. I'll push him to sell the field, and that won't surprise him, because he knows the field is good business and will pay him to sell. But we won't mix up any question of you and Michael Bellhanger's girl; because if your father thought you, or anyone else but himself, was to get anything out of the deal, he might turn me down. He's not fond of Bellhanger, and for certain reasons, which I of all men ought to respect; but I'll back myself to bring them together presently—in fact pretty quick. And after the field has changed hands and something is done about a start in life for you, then will be soon enough to spring your engagement."

"If you could only tell Mr. Bellhanger that, I'd be mighty grateful, Uncle Pat."

"Well, some such thing he must know pretty soon. I shall be seeing him next week, I hope; but I must fix it with George first—your father, I mean. I sup with him tomorrow and you'd better be out of the way. But I'm coming down to 'The Blue Peter' in an hour from the present. I'm engaged to meet a man in the private bar at eight o'clock."

"We'll go down together," said Richard. "Who are you meeting?"

"Sam Bowden. His Great Dane is off its feed and he wants me to give it a dose."

"Inspector Bowden may leave West Haven, he tells me."

"Not him! He only holds it over us to make us feel his worth. He's a rare good policeman and has helped the cause of law and order here for nearly forty years; but he won't go, because his wife would never leave her home."

"He's great against cruelty to animals," said Richard.

"He is, and I'd be sorry for him to retire for that reason. There's a lot of that sort of hatefulness about. I saw a cart-mare only this morning that had been overworked till she could hardly pull her own weight."

"I'd like to put the driver in the shafts," said Richard.

"It's ignorance," explained his uncle. "They've not got the wit to know a hot-blooded brute suffers from torture only less than they would themselves."

And the Justices always side with the labourers and farmers, never with the ill-used animals. They're a cowardly crew in my experience."

Presently they went down to the inn together, and while Patrick Rivers met Inspector Bowden, examined a hulking monster of a dog and found nothing wrong with him, Richard went into the public bar and enjoyed a little hero-worship. For to the frequenters of his father's house, the young man was a far greater personage than in his father's eyes, and the difference between the adulation of the "sport-fans," who knew him as a splendid bat and a great "centre-half" in Association football, and his greeting when, presently, he joined his parent at supper, was exceedingly marked.

George Rivers wore short, white whiskers and was disfigured by a skin ailment. A "port-wine" stain covered his right cheek and ascended to the eye-lid. Those who knew him for a good-hearted man, despite his acerbity of temper, attributed a brusque and unyielding manner to his disfigurement; but his affliction had not stood between the innkeeper and prosperity. He inherited three parts of his father's hard-won savings and had enjoyed his father's affection. While Patrick had made his own way, been unlucky in love and pursued a twilight existence afterwards, working exceedingly hard for very small money and not extensive patronage, George came in for plenty of cash and "The Blue Peter," which was his own freehold. He had married a good woman and only lost her after twenty years of united life.

It is true that he had but one child, and that was a grievance he was never tired of parading; moreover, he entertained no affection for his son. But the way always lay open for a better understanding between them. Richard could be said to have no vice save a lack of ambition, and as an athlete he had lived a clean life and was a good sportsman. There remained of the Rivers family, the eldest, a widow, who had married a rich man and failed of motherhood. Mrs. Sarah Jane Pridham had reached the age of sixty years, lived at Yeovil with a trusted old servant, and saw little of her relations. But she was thought to esteem Richard, and his father commanded him to visit her every few months. George and Patrick also came to see their sister occasionally. She abounded in good works and had her own circle of friends.

Agreeably to his brother's wish, the veterinary surgeon came to sup with George Rivers, and Dick, knowing beforehand the nature of the conversation to be held between them, made himself scarce. Patrick wasted no time and when the supper-table had been cleared he approached the subject of the Red Field. The veterinary surgeon seemed a colourless person in contrast with the innkeeper, for George was definite, loud-voiced and defiant. At a first meeting one might have judged him theatrical, with his deep utterance, flashing eyes and exaggerated gestures; but there was in truth nothing histrionic about the father of Richard. Nature, not art, induced his fiery and impatient attitude to his fellow creatures. Some-

thing of the bully and a natural pleasure in seeing people shrink had also developed his peculiarities. He was hyperbolic and ever in extremes. But his supporters declared that these unpleasant traits, so obvious in the publican's character, were of the surface alone, and challenged those who disliked and even hated George to prove any real fault against him. None could say he was not honest, or accuse him of deliberate injustice. His bark, in fact, had so far proved worse than his bite, and his bad temper and inclination to insolence with strangers only redounded to his own disadvantage.

"What the devil do you want to begin about the field again for?" he asked, lighting an old-fashioned clay "churchwarden."

But Patrick never allowed his brother's truculence to fluster him.

"On your account, naturally," he said. "Who else matters?"

"Well, it's up to him, not you. I shall think you're in with him and after a commission—yes, begad, that's your game!"

The younger laughed mildly.

"If you look back, you'll know that Michael Bellhanger is not a man I should ask for favours."

"I should think not seeing, on your own words, that he went far to ruin your life. I haven't forgot that, if you have. I've always been loyal over that job; and that's why I don't care none too much to pleasure the man now."

Patrick nodded.

"You've been a wonderful brother to me," he

said, "and don't you think I'll ever forget it. I know what you felt when Michael Bellhanger got his sister Susan to break with me. A dirty trick, and you, with your straight and honourable views, took my side from the first."

"All very fine and so I did; yet now, one would imagine you were on his side more than mine."

Mr. George frowned doubtfully.

"Not a chance! Why do you say that? I'm out for you, not Bellhanger. What's the good of the field to you? Is it worth best part of two hundred a year? He'll give three thousand pounds for it tomorrow, and if you were easy and friendly, I daresay he'd spring more."

The other considered.

"For that matter, I'd sooner have the money than the ground. All the same, I wish it was another customer."

"None else wants it, and if anybody did, they wouldn't offer so much."

"Let it go, then; and let it go through you. I don't want to meet the man for a good few reasons. He boycotts 'The Blue Peter,' as you know."

"He's teetotal, for that matter. And you must see him, George. It's your deal. No need to bring him here, and no need to go to Monks, either. He knows you're a secret sort of man and don't tell your right hand what your left does. The public needn't hear till it's done."

"I'll meet him on the quiet some evening and fix the price then," said George Rivers. "And I warn him there won't be any haggling. There's

only one way the price can move from three thousand, and that's up."

"Do this: meet him anywhere out of the way. Ask three thousand, five hundred, and work down a bit. But all in a friendly spirit."

"As to friendliness, an honest man don't find it easy to be friendly in business now-a-days. Never was such a time for sharp practice. However, if that's the way of the world, so much the worse for the world."

"A true word, George. Leave it at that, then. I'll fix a meeting-place and a date."

"Thursday next, at half past five o'clock, I'll see the man on neutral ground."

Patrick laughed.

"That ought to be all right."

"Head him off from here, however, and make it clear I don't want to go to Monks. In fact, I won't."

"That won't trouble him."

"And don't let him think I'm keen, because I'm not."

"He knows that very well—else you'd have come together before."

The talk drifted to Richard Rivers and his uncle reported satisfactory news concerning him.

"I do think," he said presently, "that the boy's beginning to see sense."

"Is he? Since when? I've marked no sign. He'll be feeling reality before long, sense or no sense. I've decided that he goes out of here next spring. If he's to be a worthless waster——"

"Don't be in no hurry. He's ready and willing

to get to work. He's took a serious turn, George. It's not a question of idling. He wants to work. The point is, what sort of work will you let him get to."

"He knows my opinions."

"But do you know his? He talked to me yesterday most sensible, and I was a good deal interested to find his mind growing clear. He's got a brain—very likely a sharper one than we guess. He knows a man can't live by football alone—nor yet cricket. But he does feel very positive indeed that he'll never make a lawyer, nor any other indoor sort of man. He's for outdoors, same as me, and you've only got to look at him to see it. He wants to be a farmer, and why not, George? Wait a minute! I know you've got a great feeling against; but is it founded on anything worthy of you?"

The innkeeper scowled and his temper rose. He flung his long clay pipe into the fender, where it crashed in a hundred pieces.

"Damn it! You do make me dance, Patrick! I despair sometimes. You can be as shrewd and far-seeing as any man when you please to, yet over this blasted boy you always talk drivel and take his side and refuse to see sense. I wish he was yours; I wish you'd take him. I don't want him. We've not a thought in common and he's always studied how to defy me ever since he was a foot high. Farming—farming—what the hell's the good of farming in England now-a-days?"

"England isn't the only place to farm in," answered his brother. "You say I'm pretty sane

most times, then why can't you give me credit for sanity over Dick? I know what you think of me, because you've proved it only two months ago, and that was the greatest compliment life ever paid me, or ever will; but why do you think I'm cracked when I stand out for an open-air life for your fine boy? You know his bent of mind—all open and easy, with a spark of your own temper when he's crossed. But is he the sort of man to make a lawyer any more than you are yourself? You know how you treat everything that is crooked and shifty. Well, why shouldn't Dick feel the same? He does. You want to be more of the pattern of the spider than the fly to succeed in the law. And, as I say, if farming ain't a very hopeful career in this country, there's many others where it certainly is. Dick isn't set on England."

"Wants to turn his back on me, no doubt, and never see me again. Thankless imp!"

"Not he. He wants to work, that's all—to work for you if you'll let him. He reckons that what he's already learned of the land is enough for a start, and I've told him about the Millchester Agricultural College, where I lecture once a week, and advised him, if you are willing, to put in a year of intensive study there and then tackle life seriously and win your respect. To give him the tuition will pay you very well and you'll find, when a year is ended, that Dick will make good and please you."

George Rivers took another clay from the box and loaded it with the close-cut Virginia he best enjoyed.

“I’m the most reasonable man on earth,” he said, “and if other people had a pinch of my wits, they’d know it. I’ll go into the subject of Richard with him in a few days, when the field is off my mind. I never shall like him, because he’s selfish and puts his arms and legs before his wits. So at best he won’t go far; but if I could buy him a thousand acres of land in the colonies and see the last of him, it might be worth the money. I should gain in my nerves and spirits if he was out of my sight. I’ll see. It’s merely a question of what will pay me best.”

The other knew too well to argue against this cynical conclusion.

“You’ll be proud of him yet, I shouldn’t wonder,” he answered. Then he rose to depart.

“I’ll go to Monks instantaner, before it’s too late to catch the man,” he said. “Your date is Thursday at half past five o’clock—‘on neutral ground,’ as you say.”

“I should rather like you to be there, also,” said George.

But Patrick refused.

“That wouldn’t do. He’d think it was two to one and that I was there to back you up. It’s my day for Millchester anyway, and I shan’t be home till all’s over.”

They parted, after Patrick had drunk some spirits, and then he set off up the hill and reached Monks just after West Haven harbour clock had struck ten.

Michael Bellhanger himself answered this late

call and looked surprised to see the veterinary surgeon.

"Hullo, Doc! What can I do for you?" he asked.

"You can let me in, Bellhanger. I've got some business," answered Patrick.

"Come on, then," replied the other. "A good few years since you was in Monks, Rivers?"

The other did not answer, but followed to the kitchen, where Bellhanger sat alone smoking his final pipe.

"The missis and my girl are to bed, so we shall have it to ourselves," he said.

"That'll do very well."

"It would have surprised me less if it had been your brother now. Will you have a glass of beer, or a spot of whiskey?"

"Nothing, thanks. I've had my night-cap."

Patrick sat down and reloaded his pipe. For a moment there was silence, then the visitor spoke.

"It's business and only business. For my part, I'd like to think friendship might follow out of business, because I'm a man of peace; but my brother George is different. To be frank, he's not very fond of you—for reasons; but he's not a fool, and he knows you want to buy the Red Field, and since he's quite willing to sell, it only remains for you to come together."

"One minute. Why do you say he's not fond of me—for reasons? I don't care a brass button whether he's fond of me or not; we're too different in our opinions and views of life to go far

together. But I go back and ask myself why he shouldn't be friends, and I see no reason against."

"That's because you don't go back far enough," replied Patrick. "I didn't come here to talk about the past, or my share in it—only the future; but if you can't remember, I'll remind you. When I wanted to marry your sister, Susan, twenty years ago, you came between and influenced her against me. You reckoned that she'd be happier and more prosperous with Simon Whyte, of the Glebe End; and you were right, Michael: more prosperous she was, though whether happier or not I can't say. But when Susan had practically promised to wed me and bring such happiness into my quiet days as I had never known, you cut in and used your influence and weight and robbed me. Oh, yes, you did. Why say otherwise? You know you did. And I was sore; for it seemed a dirty trick against one who'd never wronged you. But what you did don't matter now. Only when you ask why my brother don't like you, that's the answer. George thinks a lot of me—a lot more than I deserve—and he always held you did a bad deed when you went far to spoil my life. But leave all that. The dead past can bury its dead and I'm not here to bring up old grievances, nor yet to take up your time on my own account. You're nothing to me and I'm nothing to you. You did what you believed to be your duty and who shall blame you for that? But now my brother is ready and willing to sell the field, and he'll meet you on Thursday next at half after five and go through with it. So far as I can learn only a hun-

dred pounds, or thereabouts, lies between you as to price, and if you can meet him on Thursday, you ought to come to terms easy enough."

"Good. That'll suit me. But I'd rather not go to the hotel."

"Just so; and he'd rather not come here. He's a great one for secrecy in business, is George. Love's a mystery if it's of his own making! You can meet in the road, or anywhere. Or at the old Storehouse—nobody will interrupt you there, because the people are frightened of it after last summer. Or you can meet on common ground at Bridegate."

Mr. Bellhanger nodded.

"The Storehouse is handy for us both, and we shan't be interrupted there. Make it the room behind the sail-loft on the ground floor up the steps. We ought to fix it in five minutes."

"Behind sail-loft on ground floor," repeated Patrick. "I'll tell my brother. Now, I won't keep you longer."

He rose, but the other hesitated.

"So much for that. But you've set me thinking. I'd be very sorry to feel you bore malice for what I did twenty years ago, Doc. We were younger then, and I honestly reckoned, as between you and Simon Whyte, Susan would do wisest to take him."

"I don't bear malice. Malice is a load that only breaks the back of the bearer. And poisons his mind into the bargain. You did what you wanted to do and got your sister for your friend; and what I felt about it was no concern of yours. You

justified your action to your own conscience, no doubt, Michael. Then why should you fret as to the view I and my brother took of it? But we're not a pair of fools to let what happened twenty years ago breed bad blood now. And, for my part, I hope you'll get the field back for Monks, where it belongs and ought never to have been took away."

"Exactly so! I might as well say there was bad blood between us, because your father foreclosed on that mortgage and got the field by sharp practice in the past."

"So you might. Say what you like and think what you like, Michael. It's a free country. Good-night."

Mr. Rivers shook hands and a smile robbed his last remark of any asperity.

Then he left Monks and the farmer, watching him depart, frowned doubtfully. He did not trouble long concerning the past, however. The land was to be his once more, and that fact induced a wave of satisfaction which no remote shadow from vanished time could cloud. Already he saw a steam plough breaking the Red Field for spring wheat.

CHAPTER III

THE old Storehouse, in one of whose ruined chambers Michael Bellhanger planned to meet George Rivers, dated from a time beyond living memory. It towered like a giant above the modest roof-trees of West Haven and stood four-square to winds and weather. Three storeys high and of great area, the place had once hummed with business, when the port enjoyed its heyday of prosperity; and then, after the good days were done and its legitimate usefulness at an end, its history developed a picturesque fame. The Storehouse had been a famous nest of smugglers in Georgian days. From beneath its bulk, a subterranean tunnel extended to Monks Farm, a building as old as itself; but the exit of this channel had long been sealed up, since the homestead came into respectable tenancies, and its starting-place in the old Storehouse was unknown. Search had been made, but the existence of the smugglers' way remained no more than an oral tradition.

Rents now gaped in the roof of the ancient building; but still it towered, massive and sure-founded, one hundred and fifty feet into the air. Southward a shattered door opened upon the beach, and to the west, nestling under its withered wings, stood half a dozen fishermen's cottages.

Immediately behind these little houses rose the back wall of the ruin's fore-court, where a space fifty yards square subtended its western front. From the great court, built against the side of the Storehouse, a flight of stone steps ascended to the first floor, and upon this front no other entrance existed. The fore-court was used at this time for storage of sand. The tide-drifts renew the beaches of West Haven, and their sands, being exceeding fine, have a market value. Here, therefore, they are carted from the beaches and presently despatched, either by train, or shipped in the West Haven coasters for distant ports.

To the north of the Storehouse runs the high road through the hamlet, while eastward extends rough and broken scrub with couch-grass and mallow and shingle above the highest trend of the tide. Immediately beyond, the cliffs rise again and stretch their sponge-yellow faces to seaward.

Now this forlorn building, weathered to fine colours by western winds and dwarfing the snug and comfortable dwellings round about, was of use to the fishermen alone. In its desolate chambers they stored their paint and putty, their nets and gear. A great apartment, entered by the stone stairway, was known as the sail-loft; and beyond it opened a room where nets were sometimes stored and mended. In foul weather the long-shore men fore-gathered here, to gossip and smoke their pipes; and when it rained the children of the hamlet played their games in the echoing holes and corners. The rotting mortar of the walls was scrawled with forgotten names, and the place to

childhood offered unlimited possibilities of mystery and adventure.

But since the summer children came here no more. A vile thing had happened in the old Storehouse and a little boy of six years old met cruel death behind the walls. No accident destroyed him. He had been playing with a dozen other children; but when tea-time came he did not return to his home in one of the fishermen's cottages behind the fore-court. Dusk fell before his mother missed him and the tea hour had passed, but still little Jacky Norman could not be found. Cries and calls produced no answer; other young folk when questioned remembered that he had played with them in the Storehouse, and supposed that he had returned home for tea when they did. Then search was made and a dozen men with lanterns ransacked the crumbling ruins. His own father at last found the child in a chamber beneath the sail-loft. Jacky had been strangled there.

No clue to the crime rewarded a very passionate and painstaking search. The little lad was un mutilated, save that heavy hands had choked the life out of him; but terror of death sat upon his face.

Fury awoke in West Haven and not a man or woman but would have rejoiced to fly upon the brute responsible for this horrible crime, but he remained undiscovered and untraced. No shadow of a clue rewarded the long and strenuous investigation. The local police failed utterly to find the criminal, and, following their investigation, the lord of the manor had employed two very well-

known private inquiry agents from Bridegate, men who chanced to dwell close at hand, but enjoyed an English reputation. They came, from important Secret Service work in the war, back to their native town, and had established an intelligence bureau and won a respectable recognition. Willing enough to display their peculiar talent, Raleigh Prescott and Martin Forbes worked together on the murder of the child and exhausted their skill to solve a crime so brutal and senseless. But they failed completely, and the obvious theory that a madman and only a madman was responsible also broke down, since no such being was reported at liberty. To this theory, however, Prescott and Forbes reluctantly conformed in the long run. After all, there are more mad men and women in the world than are locked up. Prescott indeed went further. He suspected that a local man was responsible and urged that the children should not be allowed to play alone in the old Storehouse—advice quite needless, since no mother in West Haven would have permitted her little ones to enter the ruin again.

And now the murder was more than six months old and had taken its place among unsolved mysteries. The child had returned to the earth; but his mother still wept for him; his father, Ernest Norman, the fisherman, still wore a faded mourning band on the left arm of his coat. For Jacky had been their only one.

To this gaunt and picturesque repository of vanished secrets and old-time smuggler stories, some grave, some gay, there came at half past five

o'clock on the fifteenth of November, Michael Bellhanger to see the host of "The Blue Peter." The night was dark; but both men knew the way and could have chosen no more sequestered spot for their conversation.

Yet within an hour of that time, there sped news that confounded all calculation and opened the way into a problem at once profound and fearful. So devoid did it appear of reason; so impossible was it to discover, in the extraordinary situation suddenly created, any rational explanation, that those presently challenged with the mystery, after alike exhausting their powers of deduction and their gifts of intuition, were called to begin again from the beginning and seek in human character for some solid standpoint of attack. But even the character of the protagonists failed to furnish any groundwork whereon to build a theory.

The sequence of events to be described as common knowledge upon that Thursday evening in mid November begin at the little railway junction of Knighton, on the main line between Millchester and Yeovil. To Knighton runs the loop-line from West Haven after leaving Bridegate; and at Knighton, out of a train which had left West Haven at six o'clock, alighted George Rivers.

He was a very familiar local figure, and Jonathan Bright, station-master of Knighton, bade the innkeeper "good-evening" as he walked down the platform, where in five minutes the up train from Millchester was due. Mr. Bright, however, received no response to his courtesy and glancing at the traveller he perceived him evidently much

absorbed in his own affairs. Something akin to trouble marked the innkeeper's features; he stared straight in front of him with a frown upon his face; and the station-master guessed that, not his customary indifference to good manners, but a very present and active anxiety, rendered George Rivers dead to his surroundings. Mr. Bright, an amiable and grey-headed official, knew better than to question his acquaintance. The traveller passed down the platform, where others awaited the incoming train, then, sharp to time, twin headlights flashed down the long straight approach to Knighton; the murmur of the mail increased to a roar and died again as it slowed into the station and stood still. A few persons alighted; a few took their seats; then the train passed on its way and Patrick Rivers, returning home from Millchester, nodded to Mr. Bright. He was a regular traveller and a friend of the station-master, who now spoke with him and received a reply. He found, however, that Patrick was also perturbed.

"Evening, Doc," said the elder. "Your brother George has just gone up the line—worried by the look of him. Did you see him?"

"Evening, Jonathan. Yes, I got out on top of him and had two minutes' talk. He is worried, and so am I. Something unexpected has happened to us; something very surprising."

The other walked beside Patrick to the loop-line train, now about to return to West Haven.

"Not bad news, I hope?"

"Bad news, certainly. Our sister, Mrs. Prid-

ham at Yeovil, is taken ill. George heard by afternoon post from her old servant. She's in a good bit of danger and we ought to have been told before."

The other expressed his regret.

"Mrs. Pridham wouldn't be an old woman, however," he said.

"No; but she's got ailments and it sounds as though they'd suddenly gained on her."

Mr. Rivers had, however, heard more than this, apparently, as afterwards he reported; but the rest of his news did not concern the public and he kept it to himself until he should be again at home. The sudden incident of his sister's illness made him preoccupied, as he told Dick later in the night.

Arrived at West Haven, Patrick proceeded at once to "The Blue Peter" and asked for his nephew. Richard, however, was not in and nobody had seen him since a midday dinner, which he took with his father. The veterinary surgeon left a message, to say that he would return at eight and sup with Dick. He impressed upon the barman—one Saul Baggs—that Mr. Richard must on no account miss the appointment; and when, an hour and a half later, he returned from his home, the young man awaited him.

His uncle's first demand was for a telegram; but none as yet had reached the inn. He then told Dick the news.

"By good chance I got out of the Millichester train as your father was going to get in," he said, "and I had two minutes with him. What do you know, first?"

“Only that when I came home from Bridegate half an hour ago, I heard he was out and that you wanted me here.”

“Your father has gone to Yeovil,” explained his uncle. “The evening post brought him a letter from Mrs. Foster, your Aunt Sarah Jane’s factotum, to say that her mistress was perilous ill. She wrote in fear and trembling, because my sister felt sure she would recover and didn’t want her brothers to know till she was out of the wood; but the doctor told Mrs. Foster, at seven o’clock this morning, that Aunt Sarah Jane isn’t going to recover; and so she wrote off at once, unknown to the sick woman. And your father got the letter by the afternoon post and went off by the next train.”

Dick’s face fell.

“Then I reckon he didn’t keep his appointment with Mr. Bellhanger?”

Patrick considered.

“I didn’t think to ask him. Fifty to one it slipped his mind, same as it did mine. Let’s see—he might have kept it if he remembered. His train left West Haven at six, or near it, and his appointment at the Storehouse was for half after five. But he didn’t mention it and ’tis very likely he forgot Bellhanger before this shock.”

Richard, however, was more concerned for the father of Phyllis than for his aunt.

“If Mr. Bellhanger was left to cool his heels in that place,” he said, “he’ll be in no very friendly humour, I reckon.”

“You forget that people are more reasonable

than you," answered Patrick. "Try and think of the cares and anxieties of others as well as your own. When the farmer hears what made your father forget the appointment, he'll be the first to overlook it. We can't be sure yet that they didn't meet."

"I'd best to see Mr. Bellhanger tonight, then, and find out," said Richard.

"You can; but wait till I get the telegram. Your father was going to wire so soon as he'd seen your aunt."

Time passed, but no telegram arrived, and presently, as they ate together, Richard touched upon a subject more interesting to his uncle than himself.

"If Aunt Sarah Jane was to go, what would happen to her money?" he asked.

"We don't know," replied Patrick. "I hope she'll be spared a bit yet, for she does a lot of good. We can't deny that, though she's not over-friendly to her own family. As for her late husband's people, there's hardly a Pridham left in the land now, and she'll be free enough to do what she wills. But I don't reckon we've got any cause to hope. She might leave you a legacy. She's more likely to remember you than your father, or me. But I'm afraid she'll leave it all to her charity, and that won't begin at home."

"She ought to think of you first," said the young man. "Father's rich and you are not."

At half past nine o'clock no telegram had arrived and Mr. Rivers began to be puzzled.

"Your father promised to wire five minutes after he'd seen her," he said.

"Perhaps he has seen her and found her better than Mrs. Foster thought. Then he might come back tonight," suggested Dick.

They consulted a time-table and found that it would be possible for Mr. Rivers to reach his sister and return by the last train, due in West Haven at a quarter to eleven.

"There's nothing to do but stick it," said Richard. "I'll go up to Monks anyway and see if father did meet Mr. Bellhanger. I'm inclined to think he might. It's only five minutes from the old Store to the railway station. He'd hardly have forgot an important thing like that."

"Another man might have remembered afterwards, and sent a telegram from Yeovil, saying he was sorry; but your father wouldn't have troubled."

Richard admitted the truth of this. Then they went out together, for Patrick had another notion.

"There's just time to get a wire to Yeovil and an answer back," he said. "Don't stop over-long at Monks and I'll telegraph to Mrs. Foster. I don't like not hearing."

They parted and the elder despatched his telegram with a prepaid reply.

"How is Mrs. Pridham? Does George return to-night? Patrick Blue Peter."

"Now my mind's easier," said Mr. Rivers to Saul Baggs, when he returned to the inn. He drank at the bar, explained the situation to Mr. Baggs and listened while the potman chattered

of home politics. Mr. Baggs was a cheerful and humorous spirit. He maintained that he provided unction for the wounds which his master's sharp tongue was prone to inflict.

"Many men have gone out of this bar swearing they'll never enter in no more," said Saul; "but, when I get on to them, I rub 'em down the right way and fetch 'em home to the fold. If he'd only believe it, I'm worth a lot more than my wages to your brother, Dr. Pat."

"He knows it, all right, Baggs. Nothing happens here that he doesn't know. I daresay he'll surprise you with a good jump up on your money some day."

They talked and men came and went. Mr. Rivers looked at his watch, but half an hour had yet to pass before he could hope for the response to his message. Then a fisherman entered the public bar and he heard something which did not lessen his growing concern.

Joe Baggs was a brother of the potman and older than he. He suffered from a great affliction, for while Joe could hear well enough, the gift of speech had never been his. Elderly, with rough grey hair and beard, his head seemed too large for his body. He dwelt with an old sister in one of the cottages beneath the Storehouse and his back yard was bounded by the wall of the great fore-court upon the ruin's western side. Joe was quite dumb, but he had some native shrewdness and the words he formed on his huge, thick-fingered hands often set the bar of "The Blue Peter" laughing when Saul translated them. He could

speaking to his brother easily, and a friend or two, including George Rivers, who esteemed the fisherman, had also mastered his alphabet; but he did not lack enemies, for he was hard and grasping. He lived largely by his lobster-pots; and in summertime, when holiday folk swept down upon the bungalows of West Haven, would have his two rowing boats repainted and reap a good harvest from regular clients, who spent their holidays at the hamlet.

Now Joe signalled for an unsweetened gin and, having drunk it, demanded another. Patrick Rivers did not understand the dumb man's alphabet, but presently Mr. Baggs conveyed intelligence to his brother and Saul handed it on.

"Joe says that he heard a shot fired, either in the fore-court or inside the building of the Storehouse, tonight."

"A shot! When?" asked Patrick.

The potman turned to his brother.

"When was it, Joe—what hour?"

The elder considered; then he telegraphed his reply and Saul translated.

"Somewhere after five o'clock."

Joe signalled again at length.

"Somewhere about half past, he reckons. He was just off the sea and putting some lobsters in a tank of salt water in his yard. And the shot sounded quite near and made him jump."

"It wouldn't be from the miniature rifle-range on the east side, Joe?" asked the veterinary surgeon, and Mr. Baggs shook his head. Then he spoke on his hands again.

"It weren't one of the little pop guns, doctor," explained Saul: "A big bang. And Joe thinks to take a lantern and look around afore he turns in."

"Don't go alone, then, Joe," directed Patrick. "I've always thought there was more to that beastly place than we know. Get the constable on the beat outside to go in with you."

Joe nodded and prepared to depart; then Rivers turned to Saul.

"I don't like this," he said. "If your brother heard right—however, we'll leave it for the minute. Only I must know a thing or two before I turn in."

"Here's something anyway," answered the potman, as a telegraph boy came into the bar.

"For you, Mr. Rivers," said the lad.

From that hour the brother of George Rivers dated the beginning of the mystery now destined to hold so many in its dark embrace. The telegram confounded him. He stared at it with eyes that already reflected fear. Then he handed it to Saul Baggs.

"Perfectly well. Seen nothing of George. Sarah Jane."

"What does it mean?" asked the potman.

"It means that something is mighty wrong," answered the other. "But this I'm sure and would swear to: when I met my brother at Knighton, he told me no more than what he thought was the truth. He was on the way to Yeovil and had got a letter from old Mrs. Foster, my sister's cook-housekeeper, telling him on the quiet that Mrs.

Pridham was dangerously ill. That he most certainly believed. Yet now we know he never got to her and she's not ill at all."

"A proper queer thing. I hope the governor's all right," said Mr. Baggs. "Hadn't you best to see Inspector Bowden?"

Mr. Rivers considered.

"Yes," he answered. "I must see him pretty sharp. I'd be unwilling to make trouble for nothing; because if George turns up by the last train with an explanation, he'll be angry to hear we'd gone to the police; but—look at it. There must be something wrong. He promised to telegraph and he'd have known that if we didn't hear, we should be in trouble."

"He don't vex himself for other people's feelings and why for should you?" asked Saul. "I wouldn't wait five minutes if it was me."

Patrick weighed the point in his deliberate fashion.

"It's like this," he explained. "If he could have telegraphed his change of plans and did not, then he's done a very inconsiderate thing and we needn't stand on ceremony about it. And if he's in a mess and something has happened to him to prevent him from doing what he set out to do, then so much the more reason to act for him as quick as possible. In either case I can't do wrong to go to Sam Bowden. When my nephew comes back from Monks, tell him I'm at the police station."

Mr. Rivers was soon in the private office of his friend.

"Hullo, Doc!" greeted the inspector. "But what's on your mind? Any trouble?"

"Blessed if I know: it looks like it."

Mr. Bowden stroked his close beard. He was a thin, crafty-looking veteran with shrewd eyes and a long nose. He heard the story in every detail, then asked some questions.

"It was fixed up that they met at five-thirty o'clock behind the sail-loft at the Storehouse; but no man knows yet if they met there?"

"They know themselves. My brother never mentioned it, and I reckoned the bad news he said he'd received drove Michael Bellhanger out of his head altogether. But we shall hear any minute as to that, because Dick Rivers went up to Monks a bit ago, and I left word to him to come here as soon as he was back."

The inspector nodded.

"He'll hear from Mr. Bellhanger himself if your brother kept the appointment. But this is serious, Doc—I warn you of that. There's something up. Because, you see, the letter that Mr. George got from the cook-housekeeper told a lie. Did he show you the letter?"

"He didn't."

"That letter's going to be very important if he's missing. By all appearance it's a forgery, for Mrs. Pridham's housekeeper wouldn't have said her mistress was desperately ill if she was perfectly well. Now if the letter's a forgery to get your brother away from home——"

"Even if it was, Sam, how could those who wrote it know he'd have took the first train?"

“They might have been looking out at Yeovil, or somewhere on the line, in hope to see him. He’s such a noticeable man that you couldn’t mistake him.”

“But why on earth should anybody want to get hold of George?”

“No enemies you know about?”

“Good powers, no! You know him. He’s a peppery, short-tempered man—sour-tempered even; but he’s honest enough. No straight man could have a down on him—not a serious down. Rough words he spills about. but he don’t do rough deeds.”

“That’s what you say; but how much do you know? He may have bit as well as barked in some quarter you haven’t heard about.”

“We’re very good friends and never better than lately—for certain reasons,” answered Patrick. “But of course I won’t pretend I’m in his secrets. He’s a secret sort of chap in a good many ways and close about his own affairs. But I go on character, and his character I do know very well, and it isn’t in his character to have made real dangerous enemies that would go so far as crime against him.”

They were interrupted, for a policeman from the outer room announced the arrival of three persons.

“Here’s Mr. Dick Rivers, Chief,” he said, “and Mrs. Bellhanger and Miss Bellhanger have come along with him.”

“Then there’ll be light, or added darkness,”

declared Mr. Bowden, and a moment later three very anxious people entered the private office.

Mrs. Bellhanger spoke.

"Mr. Bowden," she said, "my husband's missing. We waited when Richard here came up. We waited till half past ten, and then I'd wait no more, because Mr. Bellhanger's never out of a night, unless I'm told he's going to be. He left Monks at a quarter past five o'clock, to meet Mr. George Rivers by appointment at the old Store, and nobody's seen him since. And Dick Rivers here says that his father has gone to Yeovil, and he don't know if he met my husband or if he didn't."

"Then both men are missing," answered Bowden.

He turned to Patrick Rivers.

"We'll look in the Store this minute," he said, "and if that don't show anything, I'll talk to Yeovil."

"My father missing?" asked Richard. "How do you mean, Bowden?"

"What I say, Dick. Your uncle will tell you. He's not been seen, nor yet heard of since Knighton."

The inspector left them to call constables for the Storehouse and Patrick explained to the others that his telegram had been answered. Mrs. Bellhanger, though pale and anxious, kept her nerve until the speaker mentioned that Joe Baggs, the fisherman, had reported the sound of a single shot—either from the Store, or the fore-court outside

it; then she became excited and wished to hasten at once to the ruin. It was Phyllis who prevailed upon her to do no such thing.

"Wait here," she begged. "You'll only be in the way. They can't take long and a shot's nothing. It might have been a boy letting off a cracker, or some old beam falling. Joe isn't to be trusted."

"I've felt a long time there was something wrong," said Mrs. Bellhanger to Patrick. "Michael never meant to be half an hour. And now we know your brother left West Haven at six o'clock—can't you see?"

Their suspense was of brief duration, for as the inspector returned to his outer office, a young constable and Joe Baggs entered the police station.

"There's a man dead in the Storehouse," said P. C. Walpole. "Joe here heard a shot a good few hours ago, and his brother, when he told him, advised for him to look into it, and Mr. Rivers told him to get a policeman to go along with him. So he waited for me, and we went in 'The Blue Peter' and Saul Baggs told me what Joe had heard. Then I looked into it. For a bit we saw nothing; then, in the chamber behind the sail-loft, we found a man shot through his head."

"Who is it?" asked Bowden.

"Farmer Bellhanger," answered the other. "Dead as a hammer."

The inspector gave his orders, rang up a doctor and called certain of his staff at present off duty.

"Let nobody touch the body till Dr. Colfax has seen it," he said, "and when he says the word,

let it be moved to the mortuary. His wife's in here now."

Then Mr. Bowden opened the inner door and asked Patrick Rivers to step out.

"Here's a painful job for you," he said, "and a painful job all round, I'm fearing. Michael Bellhanger's dead—shot dead in the Storehouse. I must get to the telephone and talk to Yeovil. Time's precious. It's up to you, I'm afraid, to tell the—the widow. Colfax has been sent for and when he says 'yes,' they'll take the poor man to the mortuary. That's best, I reckon, and the inquest had better be at the schoolroom. Sorry to ask you. But I must look after the other end now."

Patrick Rivers stared and his eyes rolled. He staggered and sat down.

"Bellhanger dead?"

"Shot through the head, Walpole says. Break it to 'em and get 'em home—poor things."

"But—but George?"

"Yes," answered the other bluntly, "it's George Rivers now, and the sooner the better."

In two minutes he was shut up with the telephone, and in ten, the police at Yeovil had a very full description of the vanished innkeeper.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER the first shock had fallen, Mary Bellhanger, the child of a strong and self-contained race, fought to face the grief and change that had broken up her life. Phyllis ministered to her mother until the storm of her suffering was past; then she broke down as the significance of their loss came home and the terrible nature of the event that had caused it. His only child had been much to Michael Bellhanger: their understanding and companionship were of the closest. Many days must pass before Phyllis could measure the disaster of his death; while for her, also, there developed a terrible complication and an added trial. This involved her sweetheart and did not appear until a later time; but it brought new and cruel sorrows, for presently there dawned in the wounded heart of Phyllis a melancholy intuition, destined to torment one dearer to her than herself.

The final scene of that grim night saw Richard Rivers, his uncle and Inspector Bowden awaiting the arrival of the last train to West Haven. But it did not contain the innkeeper, and the morning brought no news concerning him.

Some few points were investigated before the inquest, at which numerous local people gave testimony; but only one important piece of evidence appeared at "The Blue Peter."

Inspector Bowden directed that search should be made through the papers of Mr. Rivers—a course already pursued at Monks, where Mary Bellhanger herself made the investigation into her husband's affairs. Indeed, she knew his situation very accurately, for he had no secrets hidden from her. In the case of the murdered man, nothing transpired to indicate an enemy. After some demur, Richard Rivers and his uncle consented that the innkeeper's great rolled-top desk should be broken open and Mr. Bowden himself was present when this was done; but neither herein, or elsewhere, appeared any correspondence of importance, or a single communication suggesting serious differences between the innkeeper and another. Sharp and brusque on both sides were some of the letters which appeared; but the only one of immediate significance Dick found on a file which hung in his father's private office off the private bar.

This was the letter which had taken Mr. Rivers away by train, and subsequent examination proved it a forgery; for after Bowden himself had taken the note to Yeovil and compared it with the handwriting of Jane Foster, it became no longer possible to associate it with her. It needed no expert to see that the same hand had never produced the housekeeper's writing and the crabbed script of the letter which pretended to be sent from her. Whether the letter did come from Yeovil at all could not be proved since no envelope appeared; but the contents of this communication accorded with what Patrick had heard from his brother at

Knighton station. It claimed to come from Mrs. Foster, who wrote, unknown to her mistress, that Mr. Rivers might hear his sister was very dangerously ill and her life in immediate peril. The envelope had unfortunately been burned with the contents of the waste-paper basket in the office on the morning after George Rivers' disappearance. That he had filed the letter and not put it in his pocket to take with him struck Patrick as curious. The afternoon post was usually delivered about five o'clock and a maid remembered taking one or two letters to her master at that hour. A date showed that one of these had also been thrust upon the file for future answering. To none at the inn had Mr. Rivers mentioned his bad news and none remembered to have seen him leave. Dick contended that everything pointed to the fact that his father had never gone to the Storehouse, and his uncle argued that the forged letter might actually have been sent to prevent him from keeping the appointment with Bellhanger; but Bowden attached no weight to their opinion, while preserving an open mind.

The morning of the inquest arrived without bringing any news of the vanished man, and the inquiry served no purpose concerning his movements on the fatal evening.

After a local jury had inspected the dead, Dr. Colfax—an old but still active practitioner of large experience—briefly described the injuries and made one important point clear.

"The deceased," said he, "was shot from behind at fairly close range. A single bullet and evi-

dently a heavy one entered his head just above the base of the skull and emerged through his right eye. Death must have been as instantaneous as it is possible to imagine."

"The idea of suicide can be ruled out?" inquired the coroner, and the witness spoke with certainty upon that point.

"Absolutely. The shot might have been fired by Mr. Bellhanger, but in that case he must have held the pistol or revolver near enough to burn his hair. His hair, however, was not burned. The hand that held the weapon was probably six or eight feet away and certainly not nearer than four feet. And no weapon was discovered afterwards."

"We will come to that. How long had Mr. Bellhanger been dead when you saw him?"

"I judged he must have been dead from four to five hours."

"You discovered no evidence of a struggle, or any indications that he had fought for his life?"

"None. The chamber where he lay was undisturbed, and he had fallen backwards towards the direction whence came the gunshot wound. This often happens. He showed no disorder in his apparel and his hands and body had no wound of any kind upon them."

"A very serious factor in the case," remarked Dr. Bull, the coroner, at this juncture, "is the fact that a man, Mr. George Rivers, of 'The Blue Peter' inn, had made an appointment to meet Mr. Michael Bellhanger upon the spot where his dead body was found. But for the moment we must

leave George Rivers out of our calculations, because we do not know what has become of him. The inquest must be adjourned if only for that reason; but our proceedings will be more than formal and certain conclusions can probably be established."

Police Constable Walpole first gave evidence of finding the body with Joe Baggs, and then Inspector Bowden detailed what followed.

"When the deceased was removed from the Storehouse, after Dr. Colfax had seen him, I left two constables in the place, and brought the body to the mortuary. I then returned to the Storehouse and made a first examination. It was impossible to do much before the morning, for after twilight the place is dark as a wolf's mouth; but next day we searched the whole Store from floor to cellars—that is, as far as we could do so. We found no clue to Mr. Bellhanger's death. We made a very prolonged search behind the sail-loft for the bullet, when we heard from Dr. Colfax that it had gone clean through the head of the dead man; but we failed to find it."

"Is not that rather extraordinary?"

"No, sir. First there's cracks in the floor down which it might have fallen; but from the position of the body, which I studied carefully before it was moved, I should judge that he was standing with his face to the entrance when somebody fired from behind him, and that the bullet went out through the open door, and through the sail-loft also, and probably fell among the sand-heaps in the fore-court."

“You examined the doors and walls of back room and sail-loft?”

“There are no doors. All the doors of the Storehouse have rotted away fifty years ago. I never remember doors. The sail-loft is reached by the flight of stone steps on the outside of the Storehouse, that rise up to it from the fore-court below. There’s just a gaping hole in the masonry at the top of the steps and you walk through it into the big room called the sail-loft and the one beyond. Others open out of them on three sides. We examined the walls very carefully—every inch of them. The plaster has crumbled away a lot and the laths show in a good many places. We found nothing you could swear to as the mark of a bullet.”

“There is no indication of robbery?”

“None, Mr. Coroner. I asked Mrs. Bellhanger exactly what I might have expected to find in the pockets of the deceased, and I found just the things she named—plus two. In his black leather pocket-book was a blank cheque—the last torn out of his cheque-book at home—and a fountain-pen. She didn’t name the blank cheque, or the pen; but she wasn’t surprised to hear they were there, because she knew that Mr. Bellhanger was going to do a deal with Mr. Rivers over the Red Field.”

“What is the Red Field?”

“The big field that runs down from Monks Farm right to the road. If you’ll look out of the window on your left, you’ll see it. That belongs to Mr. George Rivers and he was just going

to sell it to Mr. Bellhanger. I understand everything was settled but the price."

"How would Mr. Bellhanger have seen to fill in his cheque in the dark?"

"He'd took an electric torch with him."

"Where was it?"

"In his pocket, sir."

"You said just now that you searched the Storehouse 'as far as you could do so.' Does that mean the search was imperfect?"

"Yes and no," answered Mr. Bowden. "It's like this: all that's known about the old Store, the police know. But that's not to say they know everything. No living man does, I reckon. It's a proper old rogue's roost of a place, and the smugglers played tricks with it for a generation or two before any of us was born or thought of. The whole truth about its holes and corners and subterraneous passages won't never be known till it's pulled down; and to do that would cost thousands, I believe. It's a huge affair, and there's a score of secrets hid there so like as not. After poor little Jacky Norman was murdered a very thorough search was made and, as I tell you, all that is known the police know. We've even got a plan of every floor; but the walls are feet thick in some places and time has brought down a lot and built up great mounds of dirt and stone in the basement that would take a regiment of men a month to break out."

"What about the secret passage to Monks?" asked a juryman.

"I was coming to that," replied the witness.

"A secret passage there is, and no doubt at all, in bygone days, the tenants at Monks were in with the 'free traders' as the smugglers called themselves, and helped them to clear their stuff and hoodwink the custom officials. The end of the tunnel at Monks gave into a cellar. But it was walled up long before Mr. Bellhanger's family bought Monks, and there's a very old man in West Haven, Nicholas Drughorn by name, who worked as a boy for a mason's labourer in those days, and he remembers when the job was done. He told about it when Ernest Norman's son died, and showed where the tunnel opened. There was a talk of exploring it; but Mr. Bellhanger was against—naturally, and the detectives never thought the murderer stopped long in the Storehouse, so nought was done."

"What about the other end of the tunnel?" asked the coroner.

"Nobody knows anything about the other end. There's nothing to show where it is, or whether it goes into the Storehouse at all. It must be buried under the masses of fallen stone and timbers in the cellars if it does go there."

"That tunnel should be worked out, in my opinion," said the coroner. "And if nothing appears to clear this case, I shall apply for an order to have it done." A woman spoke. It was Mrs. Bellhanger.

"I'm very willing and very wishful to have it done, sir," she said. "The cost would be not great, and I will pay."

Inspector Bowden found no more to add, for the

moment, and Mary Bellhanger herself was sworn, whereupon Dr. Bull immediately asked a question.

“You say that you are willing and wishful to have the tunnel explored, ma’am. Can you tell me why?”

“For no special reason, except that it might throw light, sir. Anything that can help to find out who killed my husband—anything on earth in my power—I’ll do, or pay to be done.”

“Not a costly business, you say?”

“Certainly not—so far as we can tell. To break down the wall in the cellar at Monks and then follow the tunnel wouldn’t be a great matter—not if the tunnel lies open. Then they’d find what they never yet have found—whether it really runs into the Storehouse or no. It’s a mystery and I don’t think, begging Mr. Bowden’s pardon, that it opens under the Storehouse at all, because, when the little boy was killed there, they did search the cellars and shifted tons and tons of dust and stone and made pretty sure there was no way out of the cellars except from above. I know these things because I’ve heard my husband talk about them. But he wasn’t willing that our end of the tunnel should be opened again unless the private detectives, Mr. Forbes and Mr. Prescott, wished it, and they saw no need.”

“Did the late Mr. Bellhanger object for any special reason?”

“No, sir. He believed that the tunnel didn’t go to the Store at all. He had a notion that it went away to the old lime-pits east of us. Once, going down for a glass of beer, being uncommon

thirsty after harvesting, he said he thought he heard a noise behind the wall. That was after midnight last summer. He frightened me; but next morning, when I asked him what he thought to do about it, he laughed and said it could only have been a rat."

"Your husband had no enemies—no quarrels on his hands?"

"Surely not, sir. I'd have known if it was so. All folk will tell you what a man of peace he was. He'd go round a mile to avoid a quarrel. A very popular man."

Nods and grunts from the jury supported Mrs. Bellhanger.

"You can form no theory whatever of what happened then?"

"Only what looks to be on the surface, sir."

Dr. Bull shook his head.

"At present there's no evidence to support it, Mrs. Bellhanger."

"I'm very glad there isn't," she answered quietly, "for if Mr. Rivers did it, he must be a madman."

Then came Joe Baggs to tell on his hands how he had heard a single shot. His brother, Saul, the potman, translated for him. Joe was excited, for he had never attended a legal ceremony in his life before. A few unimportant questions were asked of him, but he had nothing to say save that the shot was heard immediately after half past five o'clock. He had reported the incident some hours later to his brother, in the bar of "The Blue Peter," and gone afterwards to seek a police-

man, being warned by Mr. Patrick Rivers not to enter the ruin alone.

The veterinary surgeon was the next important witness, and the inquiry now perforce embraced the movement of Mr. George Rivers. After Mr. Bright, station-master at Knighton, had reported seeing George on the night of the murder and his subsequent conversation with Patrick, the latter went over old ground and, at the coroner's invitation, told the whole story from the preliminary agreement between his brother and Bellhanger to sell and buy Red Field.

"Neither much wanted to meet in the other's house," he explained, "and it was suggested that they could have their talk in the Storehouse—handy for both and where they'd not be interfered with. And Mr. Bellhanger went; but I'm very sure, though, as yet, it cannot be proved to a certainty, that George Rivers did not go."

"You've tried to prove he did not go, however," said Bowden.

"I have," admitted Patrick. "I tried this way, Dr. Bull. If we knew to five minutes when Joe Baggs heard the shot, and if we'd been able to show that my brother was at West Haven railway station before that time, then we should know that he didn't fire it; but Joe can't be sure to a minute, and we only know George Rivers took his ticket just before the train went at six o'clock. So proof's impossible along that line."

"I've asked a score of men whether they heard the shot," added Bowden, "but found nobody save Baggs that did hear it."

The coroner put a question to Patrick.

"Have you any theory of the event, Mr. Rivers?"

"I have a theory that we are up against a plot," he answered; "but whether the plot was directed against Mr. Bellhanger, or my brother, or both of them, I cannot say. We know for a fact that George Rivers was called away from home by a forged letter; and that letter was sent by somebody who knows all about the family, because it was personal and pretended to come from a member of my sister's household. It answered its purpose and got my brother away instantly; and my theory is that it may have been timed to do so by somebody who knew the facts. I think the letter was meant to prevent George from keeping his appointment at the Storehouse, and I think it succeeded and put his appointment out of his head altogether, before the more serious matter of his sister's dangerous illness. I may say that I am sure the letter did that; because he never mentioned either Mr. Bellhanger or the Red Field during our conversation at Knighton."

"Did he expect to see you there? Was he looking out for you?"

"Oh, no. He wouldn't have seen me if I hadn't seen him and stopped him."

"And you didn't mention the Storehouse?"

"I did not. His information was quite as startling to me as it was to him. I didn't think of his meeting with Michael Bellhanger till I was in the train for home."

"You don't believe your brother ever went to the Storehouse?"

"I feel as positive of that as I can feel of any-

thing. The idea that he was responsible for Mr. Bellhanger's death seems nonsense to me. If he killed the farmer, then he was certainly stark, staring mad. But he isn't mad, and no member of my family, or my mother's family, was ever known to be so."

"You know of no motive?"

"Absolutely none. And there could be no motive. He had everything to gain by a friendly meeting with Michael Bellhanger."

"Do you think those who may have kidnapped Mr. George Rivers will presently let him go free?"

"That is my theory, certainly."

"And the only reason why he has not been discovered already is because he is in captivity?"

"That is what I believe, Dr. Bull," replied the witness.

"If you are right, would not the unknown people responsible for such an outrage have liberated your brother before now?"

"I had hoped and expected they would. But he may know too much. He may have found out something. He may have refused to do their bidding, or give any promise. He probably put up a pretty tough fight and may have suffered from the consequences."

"A sort of man not easy to bully or intimidate?"

"Just so—the last man who'd stand it."

"In that case they might have taken extreme measures?"

"I'd hesitate to say that; and yet if he'd got to know about Michael Bellhanger, or they judged

he would suspect them of the murder after they set him free—— Or of course he may not know who did kidnap him—assuming that has been done.”

But little more remained to be considered at this juncture and the coroner decided to adjourn.

“Much should happen to throw light on the situation in a week or ten days, and no satisfactory verdict is possible at present,” he said.

The proceedings then terminated.

Two days later Michael Bellhanger sank into his untimely grave and an immense crowd assembled at the little wind-swept churchyard of Eype-on-the-Hill, where lay many members of his race. And during the same evening there came to Monks a stranger and took up his residence there. The interval of time between the inquest and the murdered man's interment having thrown no light upon the mystery of his death, Mrs. Bellhanger, by arrangement with the police, applied to the private inquiry agents already familiar with the Storehouse; and there came in response Raleigh Prescott, the elder member of the firm. He decided, after a preliminary study of the case, that at Monks itself much important work must demand his attention; and when he suggested staying there, the dead man's widow was very willing that he should do so.

CHAPTER V

RALEIGH PRESCOTT was a man somewhat undersized, but well-knit and athletic. Of fair complexion and cheerful countenance, he looked younger than his five and forty years; but he possessed character and resolution, combined with those peculiar gifts which had qualified him for his business. His partner and himself were not seldom called in after a failure on the part of the police; but since to have the police behind them was a requisite nine times out of ten, Messrs. Prescott and Forbes cultivated the friendliest and most tactful relations with the force. Inspector Bowden was already their friend and declared himself willing to serve the visitor and further his investigations so far as it lay in his power to do so.

But Raleigh made little claim upon the attention of the local police. He proceeded slowly and spent a good deal of time both in the bar of "The Blue Peter" and lesser public houses. He renewed his acquaintance with old friends, including Ernest Norman, the father of the murdered child; and it was noticed that the fisherman occupied a good deal of the detective's time. He cultivated Richard Rivers and saw something of the veterinary surgeon, also. Patrick, indeed, sought Prescott for his own ends. He desired to impress upon the

inquirer that any theory associating George Rivers with the murder at the Storehouse must be vain.

"He has not committed a crime; but he has suffered a crime," said the innkeeper's brother.

Prescott found various other channels that promised possible aid, but alive to the danger of impulsive action or premature decisions, he made no haste. Presently, however, he approached Mrs. Bellhanger with a request, but begged that the step he proposed might be taken in secret.

"I don't want anybody in West Haven to know I'm going to do a certain thing," he said. "I've reached a point, and I'll be frank and confess I don't see any light whatever as yet. Only in one direction have I got a sort of a dim feeling that there's a clue. But it's too horrible to press, or mention to other people, yet—and I trust I'm wrong. I don't want the truth to lie that way. But I'm now convinced that there are people in this place who know more than they will tell. I'm up against some sort of secret opposition here; and yet, such a shadowy thing is my intuition of it, that I couldn't name a single man or woman I've met and questioned who really opposes me. On the contrary, everybody appears to be as keen as we are to get to the bottom of this villainy and hang the wretch who murdered your husband, if he's sane and not a lunatic; and yet I'm conscious of some force working against me. It seems a contradiction in terms, but so it is. I can't point to any place where this feeling comes from. It's like an escape of gas and I don't know where to

look for the leak; and yet I smell it. I can't say I feel it here, at Monks, or at 'The Blue Peter.' I feel it everywhere in general and nowhere in particular. We detectives have got our senses developed very highly in the matter of the human atmosphere in which we move, and this opposition, so to call it, is in the atmosphere—a quite impalpable thing. You might say it was with the Rivers—uncle and nephew—who, of course, are out to whitewash the vanished man if they can; or you might say it's among the fishermen, who live in the cottages near the Storehouse and go and come there—Baggs and Norman and Falconet, who's half a Frenchman. But it isn't. It doesn't come from any special quarter at all. It may even be in my imagination alone. But there it is; and for that reason and another, I want to do a certain thing and let nobody in this place but you and Miss Bellhanger know I'm doing it."

"Anything you want to do you shall do, and we will keep the secret," answered Mary. "You mean the cellar and that tunnel, I expect?"

They sat together, the three of them, after supper. Mary and Phyllis were still shadowed by their sorrow and the women worked upon their mourning while Prescott smoked beside the fire.

"That's it," he said. "I want to open the old tunnel, but keep the fact that it is open a dead secret. If you say the word, I'll get a couple of chaps from Bridegate next week, and they shall come after midnight on Friday and do the job and go again without anybody knowing they have been.

You must send away your maid for the night on some excuse."

"That can easily be done," answered Mrs. Bellhanger. "But I don't think the Storehouse will tell you anything, Prescott. And I don't think you believe it will, either. Why should the straightforward thing always be supposed to be the wrong thing by a detective? You say you distrust the obvious; but why must you distrust the obvious more in crime than you do in every-day affairs? The obvious is what generally happens."

"You think George Rivers killed your husband?"

"Yes, I do. He was a passionate, bad-tempered sort of man and yet very secret. I believe he planned the meeting long ago and, for some fancied wrong, contrived to kill Michael and then disappear. I believe that letter was wrote by himself. I believe he'd got everything fixed up, so as he could get out of England after he'd done it. He might have gone straight to London that night and caught a boat for France, or Holland. And how do you know but his brother, Patrick Rivers, isn't in the secret and helping him on the quiet?"

The detective was about to show the emptiness of Mary's theory when there came an interruption and Dick Rivers appeared.

He arrived to keep an appointment, and Phyllis, with a look at her mother, rose on Richard's arrival and left the room.

Mrs. Bellhanger explained.

"Kind of you to come, Dick," she said, "but I

made Phyllis send for you, because there's no use in anybody living in a fool's paradise. She wants to talk to you, and I've told her that, with a sporting, fair-minded man like you, nothing she is going to say can surprise you over-much, though grieve you it will. Life's terribly changed for all of us—for you as well as me and my daughter—and we must act according and face appearances until we know—if ever we do—whether they are realities as well. We can only judge by what we see and what we feel, Richard; and I want you to understand very clearly that what Phyllis will say to you comes out of her own heart as well as mine. I didn't mention the subject to her: she brought it to me; and when she did, even then, I didn't influence her one way or another. I only said that I thought she was right, and that she must see you about it so soon as you could see her. Because she's got quite enough on her mind with the terrible loss of a dear and devoted father and mustn't have no more troubles piled up on her young heart."

"God knows I want to lessen her sorrow, not add to it," said Dick. "I know well what her father was to her, Mrs. Bellhanger. No girl ever had a better, and she mustn't think I'm not doing my poor best to get to the bottom of this. I'd swear off sleep and food and everything but the air I breathe, till I'd found the damned scoundrel who killed your husband; but what can I do?"

Something made the woman turn her eyes on Raleigh Prescott. He was looking into the fire and apparently paying no heed. Then came Phyl-

lis, dressed for walking, and into the stillness of a moonlit night they went together.

"Where would you like to go?" he asked, and she pointed to the cliffs stretching mistily eastward under the silver from above.

"I want to go where you asked me to marry you, Dick—just there where I said 'yes,' and nowhere else."

"We will do so," he answered calmly; but his heart was fearful and their silence as they walked together increased his foreboding.

Meantime, Prescott and the widow spoke together. He valued her opinions and certain far-seeing glimpses which sometimes came to her; but in her growing conviction that George Rivers had killed her husband, he could not share.

"If he didn't," she said presently, "why isn't he back? If Bowden is right, and Rivers was kidnapped and kept out of the way, so that some unknown people could kill my husband in the Storehouse without witnesses—if that's the truth, why doesn't George Rivers come home again and let everybody know what happened to him? There's a lot ought to be done about George Rivers, and I don't reckon it is being done."

"Everything that is usually done to find a lost person has been done. But I'm going to concentrate on that next week. I've got my own way of worming into a thing. I want to make friends here—more and more. I want to hoodwink one or two. There's certain people here I want to make believe I'm a stupid chap running on a wrong theory. A detective has got to play on him-

self sometimes as well as on others. You can disguise your mind as well as your body; and to a man like me it's often easier. Let me create a false impression about myself, Mrs. Bellhanger, and induce a wrong opinion of what I am; then I may reap a rich reward for so doing. Martin Forbes put me up to that tip. He's cleverer than I am—deeper by nature—but he's very anxious for me to make good over this case, because we failed with the poor little boy. And now I'll tell you something to astonish you. I shouldn't be very much surprised if I find out yet who killed that child. And perhaps, when I do, I shall be in the road to knowing who murdered your husband."

His prophecy did astonish the listener. But her quickness of perception made her see what such a suspicion involved.

"A madman!"

"Who knows? But this I do know—only keep it to yourself—close as wax. Don't even tell your daughter. The Storehouse isn't empty! We haven't got to half of the secret holes and chambers in that place. I believe a dozen men might be hid in it, so long as they had somebody outside to help them."

The woman shivered and turned pale, but did not speak.

"So I want to learn more, and I can't do better in my opinion than open this forgotten tunnel. It may be useful, anyway; or it may, of course, lead away from the Storehouse somewhere else, as you

fancy. But I shan't be satisfied in that matter till I know."

"If you can go that way, others could come that way. We don't want our throats cut some night," she said.

"You needn't fear. I'll take very good care no danger touches Monks."

And elsewhere Phyllis walked beside Richard until they came to a little valley of the night-hidden downs. Here ran a streamlet, that flashed like a thread of silver in the light of the moon; and when the water reached the cliff-edge, it leapt over, to fall far beneath upon the beach. A seat for wayfarers stood at the mouth of the gap and now the girl turned to it and Dick followed. There was no sound but the plash of the water far below, for not a breath blew and the sea was still. Far away they saw a little steamer making for West Haven and marked its green and red lights to starboard and port. It passed, silhouetted through the great fan of moonlight on the sea, and then they saw it no more.

"What is it—what is it you want to tell me, Phyllis?" asked the man, and at last she spoke with his arm round her.

"Here it was you told me you loved me," she said, "and here it is easier, for some reason, to go back to that time. It seems a hundred years ago to me, and yet it is no more than thirteen days."

"Nothing can alter that," he answered. "Our

happiness has been turned into grief enough. We are both sufferers—you for yourself and I for myself and you, too. But one thing remains for each of us to cling to, and that is one another.”

She shook her head and moved a little from him.

“No, Richard. More than my father’s death has happened to me. Can you not see? Must I do all the hurting? Do you not feel a little of what I brought you here to say?”

“Indeed, I do not. In a way this awful thing is worse for me than you. You know the worst; I am left in terrible doubt and haunted by thoughts of what the worst may be. In one way your suffering is far worse than mine—that I grant, because your father was nearer and dearer to you than ever my father was to me. I won’t pretend because he has gone. He cared nothing for me and I knew it; though, after you promised to marry me, my first thought and determination was to win him. When the Red Field had gone to Mr. Bellhanger I was going to tackle father and set to work heart and soul to make myself worthy of you. But now—now—the uncertainty—the horror of not knowing what my poor father’s fate is. That’s worse than knowing. A dead man he may be and the victim of some devilry unknown to us; or he may be alive—be hidden, perhaps tortured. It’s all contrary to reason and nature so far as I can see. You can feel for me there, I well know.”

She did not reply immediately and then she struck a bitter blow, the last that her lover had expected.

“Richard, I will tell you the truth. My mother

believes that it was your father who killed mine. You'll say it's impossible to prove any such thing. It may be; but it's just as impossible to prove he did not. And until we know he did not, my mother and I can only fear that he did. It's that I wanted to tell you, and sorry I am that you must know what's in our thoughts. But so it is—and the rest I needn't speak in words, because you'll understand without them."

Richard shrank back and stared upon his sweetheart as though some sleight had transfigured her. But she sat quite still with the moonlight on her face and her eyes looking out to sea. For a moment it seemed that he did not grasp the implication of her words. He was angry.

"Good God! D'you mean to tell me that you and your mother think a Rivers—my father—could commit a damned, cold-blooded murder and shoot a man from behind—a man who'd never done him a wrong?"

"Why shouldn't we think so? Are we the only ones? Look at it as the rest of the world must look at it. Either your father killed dad, for reasons we don't know, or else there was a madman hiding in the Storehouse that night—waiting for him there—knowing he was coming. Ask yourself this: who knew father was going there? Mother and I knew it, and you knew it, and your father and your uncle knew it—nobody else on earth."

"Nonsense, Phyllis! How can you possibly say that? There was no secret made about it. I didn't know it was a secret. They planned to go there

to be out of the way; but it's impossible to say that nobody else but ourselves knew they were going. My father may have mentioned it, though that's unlikely, because he never mentions anything to anybody before it happens; but Uncle Patrick might have done and I won't swear I didn't, because I was deeply interested, of course. And your father himself—he was a man open as daylight and tremendously keen about the field. He might have told friends that he was going to meet my father and buy the land. It's impossible to say who knew the place and hour of the meeting and who did not."

"I love you," she answered, "and I'm not going to argue about it, Richard. Maybe when I said I feared your father was the guilty one, I said more than I meant. I do love you and you're very, very dear to me; but—oh, can't you see?"

"Yes," he answered. "I can see. I'm amazed to think you could ever imagine, or dream, that the father of the man you were going to marry has done this infernal thing; and if it was your mother who made you think so, then God forgive her. But I quite understand what you want to say and your heart makes you refuse to say. You won't marry me now."

"Not with this hanging over us. I don't know how I'm going to live without you; but I've got to do it. You're a man with fine feelings and quick to understand. You must understand, anyway. There's some things too deep for words—things that only a man and a woman's heart can whisper to each other while they just sit still and hold

each other's hands. We know that: we've done it, and our hearts have talked though our lips were still. It's like that now over this awful trouble. I shall love you to my dying day, Dick, and the sins of the fathers, if sins there were, won't come between my love and you. It's yours till eternity. But——"

He interrupted, but spoke quite calmly.

"If you can believe my father did this, then well may you say what you have said, Phyllis. And if I thought he had done it—if I had thought there was a ghost of a possibility that he could have done it, I should have come to you and freed you far quicker than you came to me. That I will swear on the Book. But, being as sure that he never did do it as I'm sure I didn't do it myself, I never thought of such a hideous shadow coming up betwixt you and me. Now it's there, however."

"Please God it will pass. I only speak as I feel."

"No," he said, "it can never pass. A thing like that never passes—too black, too terrible black. It means too much. We shall live, no doubt, to learn the truth of what happened to your poor father; and if there's justice in Heaven we ought to learn the truth. But when all's known——"

He was silent, and then, as the meaning of his loss drove into him, his voice rose in sudden passion.

"D'you see what you've done? D'you understand what this means for ever more? Death—worse than to be shot and go out of it—worse

than that! Worse than to be taken out by the Germans to be shot, as I was taken, and then laughed at and kicked back to prison. Death for fifty years, perhaps—living death for me—death as long as I live. My life's ended now, and you've ended it. And I don't blame you—I love you—you're everything I had in the world—everything I wanted in the world, or ever shall want. And if my father's done this thing, he has murdered more than your father—he's murdered his son, too. And if I thought that he'd done it and come between you and me for ever, I'd seek him and kill him myself—judge me if I wouldn't—I'd take his life with these hands; and then I'd take my own!"

His voice offended the still night and his rage echoed hoarsely from the cliff face piled up above them. She had never seen him thus, or guessed that any of his father's furious and ungovernable temper lay hidden in him. His face scowled with malignancy under the moon; he gesticulated and frightened her.

But she showed no fear and answered him calmly.

"Hold in, Dick," she said. "Be a man and listen to me. I've thought about this and you have not. You are saying things that aren't true, and you've got to keep a grip on yourself, same as I must do. It wasn't easy to tell you this. I hoped and prayed that you would see it for yourself and come to me with it; and now, because you didn't, and never a doubt or dread touched you, I'm all the better pleased. If you couldn't fear that the truth might lie there, so much the more

hope for us. And you're wrong to say the shadow won't lift. There never was a shadow so dark but must be gone when God chose to lift it off. And if presently we know that your father is innocent in every way, as your heart tells you he was, then the only shadow left for me will be the shadow of knowing I had to pain you so much."

But he would not be comforted and a horrible suspicion touched Phyllis that he might know more of the truth than he declared. It swiftly passed, however, for her intuition rebelled against such a nightmare fear. Richard did not respond to her last kindly speech and she rose to go home.

"See me back," she said. "I had to tell you these things, and it's been cruel hard and you've made it harder. But you're a just man. I'd never have loved a man who wasn't just, Dick. You must try and remember how this looks to us. I won't speak of mother—she's a robbed wife and—there, I can't mend matters any more by talking tonight. Come."

He walked beside her.

"If my father's guilty, then I don't live," said Richard, after they had gone half a mile without speech. "That I swear before my Maker. If time proves my father killed yours, that's a very good and all-sufficient reason why we should never come together. But if that's happened, then I end my life, Phyllis."

"Don't say or think such things, dear heart. A man's not responsible for the blood in his veins; and I'd far rather hear you stick to it that your

father didn't and couldn't have done such a deed. I believe with all my soul the truth will come out, and before it does, I pray you, as a strong man with nought but good to his credit, to keep yourself in hand. Don't, for my sake, say these wild and foolish things to anybody. Don't let anyone hear what I've heard tonight, Richard. I love you, and if to know I love you dearly—dearly—means anything to you, then let the thought of it come between you and folly."

She was strung up to give him this sane advice. She spoke again and presently, through the storm that beat upon his mind, her voice brought a measure of peace. He struggled to regain his self-respect and was contrite.

But he said little, and when, half an hour later, they had returned, Richard saw Phyllis to her door and then went his way.

"Good-bye," he said. "You're right—you're always right. You shan't find me fail of proper feeling, Phyllis. Put me out of your mind until I can ask you to think of me again. And believe the time will come."

"I shall pray it will, Dick; and I shall never put you out of my mind for a moment. That's impossible. You are everything to me."

They parted and Phyllis joined her mother, to find that Raleigh Prescott had already gone to bed. He often retired thus early, and, at a later hour, when Mrs. Bellhanger, her daughter and her maid were asleep, would rise again and let himself out of Monks to pursue private investigations or keep a nocturnal appointment.

Her mother needed only to look at the face of the girl when she returned, for that told her all there was to learn. Phyllis and she had talked long upon the subject and shared a common decision; but the delay rested not with their determination, for that had been quickly reached. They waited only in hope of hearing Richard himself take the initiative and release Phyllis from her engagement. Now Mary's daughter briefly explained the sound reason for Dick's delay and then mother and daughter went to bed. They slept together now, that each might sustain the other through waking hours of grief and loneliness, when suffering rose to heights hard to be endured and vitality sank to its lowest.

"The reason why Richard didn't speak is clear and honest," explained Phyllis. "When I told him how things looked to us, he couldn't believe it at first. It overwhelmed him, mother, because he has never for an instant imagined his father was guilty, or could be guilty; and he never thought we could imagine such a thing, either."

"It is time the poor chap did, then," answered Mrs. Bellhanger. "In anybody else that would be a sham and a pretence; but I don't say it is in Richard. He's got little to be called imagination, yet it's hard to believe he should be surprised to find that I suspect George Rivers. He must know that suspicion is growing fast."

"It's all off between us, anyway. He saw it clearly when he recovered his temper and stopped to think. It's pretty well broken him up, but I left him with a morsel of hope. We love each

other—oh, we do—and whatever betides we shall always love each other.”

“Nobody would better like to prove her fears wrong than I should,” answered Mary. “The promise of life’s autumn for me is gone, Phyllis, and I’m like many another wife who has had to step short and sharp from summer straight into winter. I don’t know yet how I’ll endure, or where the strength is coming from that will carry me through. But I don’t forget you, nor what it was to love when I was young. If ever the truth comes to light, please God it won’t be what I fear it must be. Then you’ll be able to go to Richard with no blood between to separate. You’re right to hope. Mr. Prescott has got his irons in the fire. He’ll commit himself to no definite opinions yet, but he sees plenty of other answers to the question than I can. He doesn’t think Richard’s father did it.”

Cheered by these words they went to bed together, and an hour later, when the house slept, the detective rose. He did not, however, immediately leave the house, but lighted a lamp, donned a pair of soft list slippers and descended first to the kitchen and then to the large cellars which opened below. They were approached by a flight of wooden steps, at the summit of which stood a heavy oak door. This was padlocked inside and additionally secured, since Michael Bellhanger’s death, by two heavy bolts; for Mary had wakened to active distrust of the subterranean passage though aware that it was effectually blocked below by solid masonry.

To Prescott, however, she had given the key, and now, not for the first time, he descended and considered the place and the amount of work and time necessary to lay the passage open. The new masonry was visible enough, because built up of brick, whereas the rest of the chamber had stone walls. Prescott judged that a couple of men might well break a hole large enough to admit him in an hour, assuming the barrier to be but two or three bricks thick. A beer barrel backed here with its body lifted on a trestle. He got behind it and sounded the brick work, to find a hollow echo from his blow. The obstacle, then, could not be very considerable. Examination proved that none had tampered with the later masonry since its erection many years ago.

The detective felt no doubt that the tunnel, whose mouth was here concealed, opened somewhere inside the Storehouse, and he found good reasons for using it as a private entrance, whereby he might come and go unseen. Certain slight evidences had induced him to believe that somebody was using the Store for private purposes, and though their operations might have no bearing on his case; though they might exist only in his imagination, he desired to satisfy himself. The day before he had set a private trap in the Storehouse and spread secretly a film of powdered chalk over floors above the sail-loft and round a hearth, whose chimney opened in the roof through a rent into the air, for the stack of the chimney had long ago fallen. But he had suspected footsteps in this chamber, though it was impossible to prove them.

Now he returned to the kitchen, extinguished his lamp and put on his boots and coat. Then he let himself out of Monks and descended to West Haven and the Storehouse.

It was past one o'clock and the hamlet lay sunk in sleep. The street lamps had been extinguished and only a glimmer here and there in the houses told of wakeful people, or beds of sickness. The moon was southing, but still flooded the night with silver and spread a tattered sheet of brightness on the slate roofs of the Storehouse, where it towered—an amorphous mass against the sky. The moonlight struck here and there; glinted on the broken glass of an occasional window and spread over the shattered planes of the sea-facing front; but for the rest all was very dark and the huge erection blotted the silvery grey of the sky and flung down impenetrable shadows northerly beneath its walls. A cat howled from the cliff to the east. It had been hunting rabbits—a favourite amusement of the cats from the fishermen's cottages beneath the ruin.

Raleigh Prescott, keeping in the shadows and treading as lightly as he might, slipped into the fore-court, where moonlight shone on the piles of white sand. Then he ascended the flight of steps upon the outer wall and soon stood within the darkness of the sail-loft. Here for a few minutes he remained without movement, and then with an electric torch proceeded to his traps. He was already experiencing a sensation unfamiliar to him and so strange that he stopped to think about it. He had often in his life, at crucial moments,

been conscious of something alive as he was alive, watchful as he was watchful, perhaps watching him, or listening for him, as he was watching or listening for it. That, thanks to his own instinct in his work and a natural bent for highest activity through the hours of darkness, he had felt before and welcomed, as the hound welcomes the scent. But tonight something more than this intuition gripped his intelligence; and it also woke something more than the usual reaction and strenuous sense of danger, to tighten every nerve and guard every movement. The sense of danger was familiar enough to Raleigh Prescott, for he had moved in perilous places and taken his life in his hand on various occasions. But here was a new thing: the presence that he recognised impressed itself upon him as more than merely dangerous. It was very evil. How he knew this—why he knew it—he could not tell. Other criminals had been evil enough, with the evil of humanity, and at those moments of critical contact the thought that he dealt with the wicked never intruded. He had pitted his wits against theirs, man to man, force to force, and no question of their quality disturbed him, only the problem of their power, their cunning, their knowledge to evade him, or conquer him, in the climax of some contest between them and himself. Occasionally they had conquered him; more often he had emerged triumphant from the duel.

But here was a new disturbance of the mind and a consciousness of opposing forces intrinsically unnatural as well as formidable. It seemed

to diffuse an atmosphere so dense and penetrating that already he breathed it and found himself aware of unfamiliar sensations. The impression suddenly created he could not analyse: only two words formed themselves upon his mind: abnormal evil. He knew not fear, but he awoke to a profound interest; he called up reserves of caution inspired by intuition that he was about to come into contact with a being outside the norm of man. Had he been religious, he would instinctively have fallen upon prayer and called for supernatural assistance.

He proceeded, step by step, his ears alert for the first tangible sign. He reflected that the very sounds this being might make would possibly be different from human sounds; and this extravagance, by its own enormity, restored him to a more rational attitude. He endeavoured to banish from his mind these singular sensations, so unfamiliar and baffling. It was no time to let his brain play tricks upon him.

Then a sudden, loud noise broke the stillness of the Storehouse and reverberated hollow through the naked chambers; but it was a disturbance of Prescott's own making. As he proceeded with his torch extinguished and his hand moving upon the face of the wall, a rotten board gave under his foot and he fell with one leg through the floor. He was up in an instant; but a moment after the accident, in a chamber immediately over his head, Prescott distinctly heard two heavy footsteps, then silence. Somebody had been startled, had taken

two swift strides and then stood still again to listen.

But they were the feet of a fellow man that he had heard, and something akin to thankfulness rather than fear awakened in the explorer's mind. Indeed, he had no time for fear. Before the unexpected situation now created, the detective was called both to think and to act instantly. He guessed, correctly enough, that his own life hung upon a decision, for no friend to him or his purpose crouched taut and hostile a few feet above his head.

CHAPTER VI

RALEIGH PRESCOTT was a brave man—brave enough to confess that he hated danger. Caution also belonged to him, as a large ingredient of character, and he knew that this was no occasion to take risks, since the chances against him were too considerable. A nocturnal enemy hidden in this labyrinth enjoyed such advantages over another who might seek him, that any search would be unjustified. The unknown was on his own dunghill; he probably knew every turn and twist of the Storehouse even better than Prescott himself; to seek him under these circumstances was to ask for a bullet in his head. If, indeed, a foe harboured on the floor above, this would happen. But did one? The detective felt no doubt on that score, and that these operations in the Store at such an hour might throw light on the mystery of Bellhanger's death he also suspected; but the more valuable this unseen witness, the more dangerous would he be.

Then Prescott weighed the present situation. The man above knew that somebody stood beneath him and, seeing the hour and the place, he would certainly guess who it was. But did the man above know that the nightly visitor had heard him? That was the vital question and Prescott saw that if

the other did not know his presence was discovered, no harm had been done. These reflections occupied a far shorter time to flash through his head than to set down, and he acted instantly upon them. The unknown must be made to believe he had neither been heard nor suspected. He could not be sure, though his inclination would be to hope that he had not. Therefore, Raleigh Prescott now strove to set at rest the agitated consciousness alert in the chamber overhead.

To indicate his quickness of thought, it is enough to say that thirty seconds after he had suffered his fall and shattered the silence of the ruin, he began to curse, then to whistle cheerfully, stump about and flash his torch around him. But all the while he moved to return to the sail-loft and so leave the building with utmost expedition. Judging it possible that, once outside, unseen eyes might watch his exit from somewhere above, he limped, and when clear of the steps and in the white glare of the moonlight, he sat upon a sand-heap for two minutes and rubbed his leg to suggest an accident.

Meantime, his thoughts continued to work rapidly, for this discovery had challenged to immediate action. A man was in the ruin at two o'clock in the morning. Therefore, he could not be anywhere else. Certain individuals had already awakened Prescott's suspicion and this event offered an opportunity to advance his knowledge respecting them. He concentrated upon two individuals and went first to Ernest Norman, the fisherman, who lived with his wife in one of the little sea-

facing cottages to the southwest of the Storehouse. Prescott soon stood at the door and knocked. He had not to wait very long for a head quickly thrust out of a window immediately above the door and Norman recognised his acquaintance beneath.

“Mr. Prescott! Bide a moment and I’ll come down house!” mumbled the fisherman; but Raleigh bade him do no such thing.

“It’s all right—only wanted to know if you were at home and not at sea. Go to bed again. I’ll tell you everything tomorrow morning.”

He was gone before the wakened man had time to ask for information, and Ernest returned, grumbling and mystified, to his wife.

“What the devil’s the meaning of that?” he asked; but Jenny Norman told him not to trouble himself. She had seen a good deal of the detective during his endeavours to explain her little son’s death, and she believed in him despite his failure.

“He’ll tell you tomorrow. You see how hard he’s working—night and day. There was a reason why he wanted to see if you were home; and now he knows you are he’ll feel content.”

Meanwhile, time being all important in this inquiry, Prescott ran to “The Blue Peter” and was ringing the bell of the private entrance five minutes after he had left the shore cottages. Here he had longer to wait and he rang a second time before—shock-headed and drowsy—Saul Baggs appeared in light attire.

“God’s goodness, Mister!” he said. “What’s

up now? Don't tell me you've caught the murderer!"

"I want Mr. Dick Rivers," answered the other. "And I want him sharp. Won't keep him half a minute; but something has happened, Baggs, and it's important he should know it."

Saul collected his senses. He was a man who did not wake easily or quickly, and his mind hardly grasped the situation as yet.

"He wasn't in at closing time, or, if he was, I didn't see him," he said.

"That's right, he wasn't. He went out with Miss Bellhanger; but he must be in hours before now. Buck up and call him."

"So I will—so I will. Would you be wanting a drop of liquor?"

"No—push on. It's important."

Mr. Baggs deposited a lamp beside Raleigh and hastened upstairs. But in two minutes he had returned.

"He's not home," he said, "and he hasn't been in."

"Is that unusual?"

"Certainly. It's unusual for any West Haven chap to be out of his bed at half after two in the morning. Mr. Dick's very regular and always turns in afore midnight to my certain knowledge."

"Where might I find him, d'you reckon?"

"Lord knows. I don't like this, Mr. Prescott. His uncle ought to be told, I reckon."

"Might he be with his uncle, should you think?"

"He might. He often goes there. They've got

a good bit to talk over at present; but I never heard as they turned night into day before."

"I'll try there, then. And if he's not been heard of there tonight, then I'll come back."

"I'll get on my clothes. I'm frightened," declared the potman. "Inspector Bowden had better be called up, don't you think?"

"Wait till I come back. Richard may be keeping it up late with Mr. Rivers and have forgot the time."

Prescott set off for the veterinary surgeon's house perched to the west of the haven. He hastened by the harbour and the range of bungalows beyond, and reached his destination without sight of a fellow creature.

But the house was dark and only the moonlight flashed in the windows above and below.

He rang a night bell and was quickly answered by the surgeon himself. A window opened above him and Patrick Rivers looked out.

"That'll be you, Mr. Norrington," he said. "I was half expecting you. Is the horse worse? Down in five minutes."

"Wait!" shouted the detective. "It's me—Raleigh Prescott. Have you seen your nephew tonight, Mr. Rivers?"

"Dick? No. He wasn't up this evening."

"Well, he hasn't been home since his supper, apparently. I happen to know that he went out with Miss Bellhanger and saw her home afterwards; but since then he's missing."

"Missing? What d'you mean?"

"He isn't at 'The Blue Peter,' anyway, because

I've just been there to find him. Saul Baggs answered my ring and went to seek Richard Rivers. But he's not there."

A note of concern and distrust marked Patrick's next question. He seemed to bristle and was evidently perturbed.

"What the devil did you want Dick for, Prescott?"

"Well, I did want him and I do want him—to clear something up. He's not here and hasn't been here, you say?"

"Certainly he hasn't; but there's something queer if he isn't home. He's a very regular man and very keen to keep himself fit for sport. If you'll wait five minutes I'll come down and take you back to 'The Blue Peter' in my Ford. I was half expecting a client who's got a horse very bad out at Golden Cap."

"If your nephew's not back we must look for him," said Prescott, and the other agreed. Then he withdrew his head and ten minutes later descended. He was much concerned and begged to know what had brought Prescott at such a late hour to seek his nephew. The other, however, did not enlighten him.

"Wait till we've found Richard," he answered. "He can explain better than I can—no doubt."

But Mr. Rivers was suspicious.

"I hope there's no bee in your bonnet about him," he said. "You're a student of character and ought to know by instinct that he's straight enough."

"I never have an instinct that anybody is

straight—or crooked,” explained Prescott shortly. “I purposely rule out any general impressions of that sort, because they often unconsciously affect your work and may lead you astray. I’ve been busy tonight and I suddenly wanted a question answered right away. It was such an important question that I felt it wouldn’t keep till morning; and I reckoned your nephew would be only too glad to be waked up to answer it. Of course, I never imagined he wasn’t in bed and asleep. But he isn’t, and as Baggs was quite as surprised as myself and told me Richard keeps good hours, I naturally felt something might have gone wrong with him. Then I heard that the young man was more likely to be with you than anybody—so I came along.”

“I hope nothing has overtaken him. He’s in a very worried, morbid sort of state. You don’t happen to know why they wanted him at Monks? The last I heard was they’d asked him there tonight about something.”

“I couldn’t tell you. He went for a walk with his girl; then brought her home, but didn’t come in again.”

They had now reached the inn. Lights were burning and the private door open. Then they heard Richard Rivers himself speaking to Baggs, and a moment later stood before him together.

The young man looked haggard and dazed.

“What on earth is all this?” he asked. “Baggs tells me you were here looking after me an hour ago, Prescott?”

"Thank God you're all right, anyway," answered his uncle.

"Of course I'm all right. Why shouldn't I be?"

"The point is, where have you been since you left Monks, Richard?" questioned Raleigh Prescott. "You must know that a man doesn't disappear into the small hours without a reason. I wanted you and came to find you. Then the pot-man, to his surprise as much as mine, discovered you were from home."

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"The question is why should you be? No doubt you can answer that. I only want to know."

"Then, first, I've a right to ask why you want to know, and what brought you here at such a God-forsaken hour to find out?"

"That's my business," answered the other shortly. "And I may tell you why at another time—not now. You know what I'm at West Haven for, and what I'm working on; then surely it's up to you to help me in every way possible—not hinder me?"

"You're here for Mrs. Bellhanger," answered Patrick Rivers mildly. "But, naturally, Dick and I are as anxious as she is to get to the truth. Why, then, do you make a mystery of things and ask us questions and refuse to answer ours?"

"You must see," added Richard, "that to turn up here looking for me after two o'clock in the morning was a curious thing to do, Prescott; and I've a right to know what you did it for."

The other was conscious of something approach-

ing hostility in Dick's voice and he also perceived the weariness and distress upon his face.

"Go to bed and see what light the morning will throw on it," he answered quietly. "At present you decline to tell me where you were between the hour you left Monks, after bringing Miss Bellhanger home, and the time you returned here. That's something more than three hours. Why do you hesitate? I'm sure your uncle will agree with me, on second thoughts, that I have a perfect right to ask you. Doesn't Mr. Rivers want to know, too? He was exceedingly anxious on your account half an hour ago, I can assure you. I shall be at Monks till ten o'clock tomorrow morning; and I shall expect you, Richard. Good-night."

When he was gone, Patrick turned anxiously to his nephew.

"This won't do," he said. "We shan't help the truth by falling out with him. He's an honest, decent man and a clever one and a rare worker. I don't suppose we have any right to ask him for his reasons; but I see this: something must have happened after you left Monks which made Prescott wonder about you."

"Something did happen, but nothing he knows and nothing that concerns him," answered Richard. "I've got nothing to hide, for that matter, only what caused me to be wandering so late is no business of his."

"Can you tell me, Dick?"

"Of course I can. I should have, anyway, tomorrow. I'm down and out: that's all. Phyllis has thrown me over."

Mr. Rivers was moved. He showed sympathy, but not astonishment.

“Her mother said something about it to me two days ago. You mustn’t feel it’s past praying for. Everything depends upon the future and what the future has hidden. If your father had killed her father, as Mrs. Bellhanger—God forgive her—at present believes, then you’d have to give her up, Dick, because all good feeling would point that way. I should uphold that. But you know in your heart that your father never did it; and I’m with you, because no Rivers ever could commit such a cowardly, damnable crime. And you must have faith and patience and unlimited pluck. My brother isn’t hiding from justice. He’s hidden to defeat the ends of justice—either that, or his own life has been taken, as the only sure way of keeping his mouth shut for evermore. But I won’t give up hope; I won’t believe an awful thing like that has happened for many a long day yet. Where were you, then?”

“I’ve been tramping about, that’s all I’ve been doing. I forgot the time and everything when she said it was ended between us. There’s nothing matters in the world but her. It was like death. It seemed to make everything else so unimportant. Somehow, I never saw that might happen. Love blinded me about it. But her mother, no doubt, showed her it couldn’t be—until we knew the truth.”

“You just went roaming about?”

“That’s all. I couldn’t turn in. I felt in a sort of fever. I seemed to feel it worse after I saw

her home and knew I must never kiss her 'good-night' again. Never kiss her again; never feel she's mine again. A pretty hopeless fix for me, Uncle Pat; for if my father has disappeared for good and all, then the world will always think he was the murderer."

"The world will never think so," answered the other. "No sane man or woman who knew your father can ever think so. And what's more, after time has passed and Mary Bellhanger settles down and can reason clearly again, she won't think so, either. She's too sane and intelligent a woman to believe this for ever. And if she changes, so will Phyllis change. Even if we never hear of George Rivers again, we may live to show the people he couldn't have done this thing. Where's the motive? Where's the reason? None on earth. All the other way."

"I'll own up to Prescott tomorrow," promised Richard, "and what you say shows that there's a grain of hope yet. Prescott doesn't much believe my father did it, for he told me so. I'll explain to him tomorrow. He's a decent chap and God knows nobody here wants to make his work harder. You get home, now, but have a drink first; then I'll go to bed. A ray of hope, I believe. I wish I'd come to you instead of tramping over the cliffs again and walking just where I'd walked with her. I went right to the place where she'd told me, and there I sat, and time properly stood still. I'll let the detective know how it was with me; then perhaps he'll tell me what he was after. It's a rum thing he got wind of the fact I hadn't come home."

"We must keep in with him," said Mr. Rivers. "Sometimes I think we ought to put another special chap on to it for our satisfaction—to work for us and try and get at your father."

"The police are trying to do that without any help from us. They've got some of their big swells from Scotland Yard after him. Only three days ago Prescott was telling me about them. Scotland Yard thinks that father has committed suicide in some such way that he won't be discovered."

"They always think that when they can't find a person," answered his uncle. "The last thing he'd ever have done. Well, get to bed. I'll be down tomorrow. Mr. Secretan, your father's lawyer, says he's arranged with the bank for you to have some money to carry on. You must go up and sign something."

"Did he say anything about the will?"

"I told him that you wanted to know, if possible, the general situation; but Mr. Secretan said he wouldn't feel justified in doing anything in that matter yet. He's as sure as we are that your father's a victim in this matter, and nobody knows your father better. Secretan's all right, but he's cautious, as a lawyer ought to be. You'll hear in fullness of time; but not yet, until he's convinced you ought to hear."

They parted, after Richard had made his uncle drink some old brandy and promise to dine with him on the following day. To the last, the elder strove to cheer him.

"The light will break," he said. "It's a pretty

awful thing to fall on the likes of us, with a clean record back through generations; but I've got a sort of feeling that we're through the worst of it. See that chap tomorrow and don't be shame-faced. Tell him the truth, and if he has ever been in love himself, he'll believe it. He's a decent man and only wants to do his duty, like the rest of us."

But Richard over-slept himself and it was nearly eleven o'clock when he woke up and remembered the appointment for ten. He tumbled into his clothes and hastened to Monks, where Raleigh Prescott was just setting out on foot to Bridegate. He welcomed Richard without reserve and accepted his excuse. Indeed, information gleaned that morning had already thrown light on the young man's melancholy appearance and evident distress as displayed in the early hours. For Phyllis did not come to breakfast and her mother gave the true explanation of her absence. Prescott knew that Richard was betrothed to Phyllis Bellhanger and, weighing the fact, along with every other fact which might, by possibility, bear upon the case, he had regarded Richard as a figure not to be ignored in his investigation. Now inquiring for Mary's daughter, she told him that the girl had broken with Dick on the previous night and had slept ill as a consequence.

"I'm going to town, and if you've nothing to keep you, you can walk a mile beside me, Mr. Rivers," said Prescott when they met. "Have you turned over what I said?"

"Yes," replied the other. "You were in your right. Why you wanted me is your business, and

why I wasn't there is mine. But I'll tell you, because I've figured it out that you have every right to know. I don't think I've been out of my bed at half past two in the morning in my life before. I keep good hours, as an athlete like I am must do. Last night I went for a walk with my girl. That much you know yourself. Then she broke our engagement—for reasons I can't quarrel with, though God's my judge they'd never occurred to me. That was because I'd not for a moment thought my father could have killed her father. But Mrs. Bellhanger, it seems, does think so, and she's put the thought into Phyllis. And so there's an end of it and she had to be free of me. Well, a thing like that left me guessing, you understand. I saw her home and then I wandered miles and miles over the cliffs and sat where we'd sat together, in the gap by the waterfall, trying to see light. I sat on there forgetting time; then I came to myself and went home. I was going to let myself in, but found, to my surprise, a light in the hall and Saul Baggs waiting. I thought he'd found out, somehow, I wasn't home and got scared; but, of course, he'd never have known I was out if you hadn't come and asked for me. I was putting him off with a yarn about stopping at Bridegate and forgetting the time, when you and Uncle Pat turned up."

"You didn't tell Baggs what you've told me?"

"I couldn't go into my troubles with a servant. It didn't matter what I told him. But, of course, since you wanted to know, you had to know."

"Thank you," answered the other, and Richard

said no more for a while. Whether Prescott believed him or not he never considered, but in his turn he asked a question presently.

"And now do you see your way to telling me why you came to look me up?"

The other shook his head.

"Frankly, I don't, Mr. Rivers. I might hatch up a falsehood to satisfy you, but I'll pay you the compliment not to do that. I had a reason and a very good one; but I have also very good reasons for not telling you, or anybody else, what they were for the present. You shall know what they were some day for certain. But, for the moment, I'll keep them to myself."

"Right," answered Richard; "then that lets me out?"

"Yes; good morning."

Rivers turned homewards and the detective proceeded on his way. He regretted the need for secrecy and was sorry that the other had put his question, but he did not trust Richard and felt not prepared to take him into confidence. He knew that Dick was a clean sportsman with a good record, but he had also learned the youngster's reputation for unconquerable laziness and his unfriendly attitude to his father. Much remained to be worked out and he did not actually associate George's son with the crime at present occupying his attention, but he regarded him as a figure very near the problem and not so removed from the possibility of collusion that he could be trusted. The young man's explanation was reasonable and Prescott inclined to accept it, but he could not be

sure. It still remained as quite possible that he had heard the footfall of Richard Rivers in the Storehouse.

Now he dismissed the other from his mind, and the old wonder at his recent mysterious sensations for a moment recurred as he walked briskly forward.

Whence had arisen that feeling of pollution in the Storehouse on the previous night? He experienced no such emotion when face to face with any of those who at present concerned him. Certainly there was nothing unnatural about Richard Rivers. He appeared to be an unusually powerful and finely built man, and save for the sulky expression of his features, might have attracted rather than repelled. He did not appear devoid of frankness, and his simple and pathetic explanation of what had led him to wander under the moonlight on the previous night sounded genuine enough. The facts responsible for his alleged action were at least true, even if the account of his actions was not. As for Ernest Norman, the detective had never wholly fathomed him, though upon the occasions of his last visit to West Haven and his fruitless endeavour to discover the cause of Jacky Norman's death, he had seen much of the fisherman and studied him closely. He was a man of good physique, though past his prime, and mentally, while not lacking enough intelligence to lift him beyond the danger zone of doubt, yet, in Prescott's opinion, revealed a hitch somewhere and a sort of callousness that put his intellect near the border-land. Not until the present inves-

tigation, however, had he ever dimly wondered if this man really knew anything more of his child's death than appeared. Had he, so Prescott asked himself, entertained some suspicion, true or false, of the unknown scoundrel responsible for little Jacky Norman's end? Was it possible that Norman had built up some theory of that horrible incident and perhaps revenged himself on Bellhanger, under the impression that the farmer had committed the crime? It was a far-fetched theory and only the fisherman's curious mentality inspired it. At least the inquirer knew that it was not Ernest Norman he had heard in the Storehouse, since he had proved it and found the fisherman in bed. Nor could he longer believe that Richard Rivers had moved hidden above him. His growing inclination was to credit Dick's statement.

Who, then, was there, and what had awakened that mental loathing unexperienced till then? Would the presence of a madman have done it? Prescott put the question to himself and answered it in the negative instantly. There was no aura of wickedness, or evil, about insanity. A lunatic might commit a crime and do evil; but he could not sin or be evil in himself. Raleigh went out of his depth at this point, for metaphysics was a sealed book to him.

At Bridegate, he looked out a master-mason and, during the dinner hour, when this man and a colleague could listen to him, explained his wish, directed the closest secrecy and engaged the pair

to attend him at Monks Farm on the following night.

"The maid-of-all-work goes home for a holiday and the coast is clear," he explained. "Only Mrs. Bellhanger, her daughter and myself know what I intend. It's not likely to be a long job, for I want no bigger hole than will let me into the old tunnel. Turn up round midnight, bring your tools and don't tell a living soul what you're after."

The masons agreed and promised silence; then Prescott proceeded to his office in High Street, that he might see his partner, who had returned on the previous day.

Meantime, Richard Rivers went home to accomplish a task postponed until now. He felt the necessity to make a close examination of his father's affairs and since the adjourned inquest was to be resumed on the following day, judged that this duty should be no longer neglected. He anticipated nothing from it and had, with Inspector Bowden, already proved that no helpful or incriminating material existed among the papers that he had found; but there remained an old, iron muniment chest in the innkeeper's office. It was a small affair, picked up at a sale by Mr. Rivers, and it opened with two keys. So far as Richard knew it only contained old account books and ledgers, which his father was always going to burn, but he had postponed doing so. The keys were missing and it would be necessary to pick the locks of the little chest. The fact that its twin keys had disappeared caused Richard to reflect

at the time of the first general search through the office. He knew that they usually hung on a nail above the bell handle in the right-hand side of the office mantel-shelf; but nobody had marked their disappearance until they were wanted. Now he called at a blacksmith's near the harbour and presently returned with an old man skilled in the science of picking locks.

The operation interested Mr. Gedge, but proved a simple task for him. The two locks both yielded to his skeleton keys without any need for violence, and after he had thrown back a heavy iron lid he went on his way. The chest was nearly full of old account books and a visitors' book, now filled up and long since superseded. Richard turned its pages and distracted his mind with the rough sketches, rhymes and thin humour common to such volumes. He told himself that he would show it to Phyllis; then he remembered and let the book slip from his hands back into the box. For half an hour he sat staring at nothing, but presently pulled himself together and proceeded with his task.

Five minutes later he was kneeling by the chest with perspiration breaking over his forehead and a great new horror at his heart. At the bottom of it lay an old revolver, and swift examination showed Richard that one chamber had been discharged.

CHAPTER VII

THE significance of his discovery was appreciated instantly by Richard Rivers. Not gradually, but like a flash of lightning, the meaning of what he had found struck into his brain and he knew that the last hope was dead. No concern for his unfortunate father now occupied his thoughts, but only grief and confusion for himself. The guilt of George Rivers, if not proved by this discovery, must be substantiated in the minds of most impartial people. But that aspect of the situation did not trouble him. It was not the vanished man but his own stricken life and ruined hopes that confounded Richard now. Even if he concealed this clue, put the revolver in his pocket and flung it into the sea after dark, nothing would be gained for him. He might deceive others and continue to support the theory that George Rivers had been sinned against rather than sinning, but he could never again deceive himself; he could never again seek to assure Phyllis that her mother's suspicions were baseless. Very massive proof now existed to show that his father had killed Michael Bellhanger and, having done so, had returned home for certain purposes before catching the evening train. One of those purposes was to conceal the weapon with which he had committed the crime.

From the implication of what he had now revealed and its fatal bearing on his own hope, the young man presently recovered sufficiently to face his immediate response. He asked himself what he should do. He hated the name of his father now and cared not at all to shield so base a criminal, but there were two others who demanded his consideration. First he thought of his Aunt Sarah Jane Pridham; next of his Uncle Patrick Rivers. Yet he could not bring himself to reveal the evidence against his father even while his own strong inclination was to do so. He felt at this moment that it had satisfied him and that he must never claim the love of his sweetheart again: he would be honest there; but he did not feel any temptation to blast the family reputation and leave himself and his uncle and aunt under the stigma of the crime. None the less, another monitor urged him to make clear what he had found, and he had argued himself into a condition of indifference before he cut the knot and came to a strange conclusion for one generally so steadfast in his decisions. Games had taught him the vital value of making up the mind quickly and finally. He knew that a man of divided purpose, or infirm will, never excelled in any branch of sport. Yet now, faced with so great a challenge, he avoided it and left action to the arbitrament of another. He returned the revolver to its hiding-place, piled back the books upon it as he had found them and waited until his uncle arrived to keep the appointment of the previous night and dine with him.

Mr. Rivers was hurried, but he consented to do as his nephew begged in one particular.

"I've had the iron chest opened at last," said Richard, "and it only looks to contain old ledgers and rubbish. But anything or everything may be useful to me, if not to the police. You might run through them and save me the trouble. There's such a lot on my hands. I'm going to see the lawyers after dinner."

His uncle agreed.

"I'll go through if you like. You see, Dick, if you're going to carry on here, it may be worth your while to read those old accounts and get a general idea of how things go. The bookkeeper, Miss Marsden, will help you to master the manner of it."

"I'm hung up every way. There's no inducement to go on living at all that I can see—here, or anywhere."

"You must put a bold face on it. The light may break through yet. I'll never believe—not if an angel came to say so—that your father killed Michael Bellhanger. Every common-sense argument is against such a thing."

Richard did not answer and they ate and drank in silence. Their meal was brief and after it had ended the elder asked a question.

"You've seen Prescott?"

"Yes. I walked half-way to Bridegate with him this morning and told him the exact truth. He was friendly enough, but whether he believed me I can't say. To him, perhaps, it sounded rather wild."

“And why did he want to know? Why did he turn up after you last night?”

“I asked him straight,” answered Dick. “As I’d made a clean breast of it, I thought he would. But he didn’t. He said he’d very likely tell me some time, but not yet. How d’you read that?”

Patrick’s forehead wrinkled.

“I can’t say,” he answered. “Suppose, for the sake of argument, he thought you might know a bit more about this thing than you’ve told—well, he’d very likely try to pump you and begin by putting you at ease and making you fearless of him. But why on earth should he suddenly rush you at such an hour? I couldn’t make out, when he came and knocked me up, if he was suspicious of you, or anxious for you. What happened last night to make him one, or the other, only he can tell. But something happened.”

“Mrs. Bellhanger might help us,” reflected Richard. “So far as I know, when Phyllis came out with me, Prescott was left there alone with her mother; but where he was when I took Phyllis back—whether in the house, or out of it, she’d know.”

“She would,” admitted his uncle, “but I’m not sure if you can ask about that. You see, of course, the man is working for her, and we can’t well inquire about his movements, because she’d probably want to know what business it was of ours. Especially believing, as she seems to, that your father’s the guilty one.”

“It doesn’t matter anyway,” replied the younger. “I’ve got nothing to hide. In fact, who,

has? If we knew who has, I suppose we might get a line."

"You didn't meet anybody, or say 'good-night' to a coast guard or such like?"

"Not a soul."

Mr. Rivers was indisposed to leave the subject.

"I'll think of it," he said. "Don't you do anything. There's the adjourned inquest on the farmer tomorrow, and Prescott may say something at that to show what's in his mind. He's going to be called, so Sam Bowden tells me; and you'll be called, to say if anything among your father's documents has thrown any light on his disappearance. And, after it's all over, you might sound Prescott, or perhaps Mrs. Bellhanger, if nothing at the inquest forbids it."

Richard was indifferent. He desired to be gone. He reminded his uncle of the chest and a few minutes later caught a train from West Haven and proceeded to his father's lawyers in Bridgegate. The question was a power of attorney for Richard himself and the control of necessary funds at the bank.

He remained not long with the men of business. The head of the little firm, an old acquaintance of his father, proved friendly and helpful. He could pretend to offer no solution of the events, but declared a conviction that George Rivers, whatever his faults of temper and lack of self-control, would not commit a crime.

"He was a man scrupulously honest and righteous in everything that really mattered," said old Mr. Secretan.

"D'you think we shall ever see him again, Sir?" asked Richard, and the other shook his head.

"I do not. I believe that he has been drawn against his will into some extraordinary concatenation of events, Mr. Richard; and I much fear that see him we never shall, for the reason that he is dead. I may be wrong—please God I am—but that is my opinion at present."

"What must I do, then?"

"It is all in the future. Leave to presume death would certainly not be granted yet awhile if at all, before the statutory time of seven years. However, the courts are reasonable enough in these cases as a rule, though this, of course, is a very exceptional case. Rely upon me to guide you and relieve you of all passing anxiety. There is plenty of ready cash."

Dick thanked him and set off presently to walk home, since no train served. He fell in with a friend, however, and stopped talking at Bridegate for an hour. Then his companion, a young sportsman, motored him back to West Haven.

Returned, Richard's first care was his father's office. There, on the desk, lay a brief pencil note from his uncle.

"I have been through the box carefully," wrote Mr. Rivers. "It contains only old ledgers and two old visitors' books. The ledgers will repay your perusal; but there is nothing in the chest to interest the police, or help us in any way."

The communication did not greatly astonish the recipient. He had guessed that his uncle might suppress the revolver. A shadow of doubt and

a twinge of conscience clouded his mind for a moment; but he cared very little. Dull inertia and indifference crowded down upon him. He knew not what to do or where to turn, and he cared not much what happened. Life seemed emptied of all its savour and the future held no ray of promise for him. His uncle could still, it appeared, fight for the credit of the family; but Richard knew that he could no more hide this knowledge of the truth from his own heart than he himself was able to do. He guessed that the revolver would soon lie heavy on his uncle's conscience.

Not until the following day did he see any of those interested in the case. That night instinct inclined him to visit Phyllis, and he even set out to do so; but the futility of such an action impressed itself upon him. His soul sounded its lowest depth and he knew what had happened must render vain all further thoughts of her. With him the irrevocable was now known; but she had yet to learn that they were parted for ever. How the news would come to her, and when, he could not guess. The inquiry to be renewed on the morrow would probably throw no more light, and the new evidence it was clear his uncle intended to conceal. Patrick would never guess that Dick had seen the revolver. But he began to accuse himself of cowardice now. His feet slowed and stopped at the outer gate of Monks and he was just about to turn away when Phyllis herself descended the path through a little garden, where bright flowers made a cheerful picture in summertime. She saw him and greeted him kindly. Her voice was small but

not melancholy. The night was dark and he could not see the sorrow on her face. He stood beside her and took the hand she lifted to his.

"I came drifting up from force of habit," he said. "But suddenly I remembered and I wasn't coming in."

"Why not, dear Dick? Can we ever be anything but friends whatever happens?"

"No," he said, "we can't be friends, Phyllis. We've reached far beyond friendship. I'd die for you and glad to, or I'd wed you, as well you know; but friendship's a tame thing to a heart as fierce as mine. I'm going to clear out and go abroad when I can—that's the only way for me."

"You're right," she said. "I know very well what you mean. I only said it for something to say. It's all, or none, for us, Dick. Walk beside me. I'm going shopping for mother. Nelly's away for a holiday and she's forgotten some things. We're excited because there's an adventure in store tonight."

"An adventure?" he asked dully.

"You must hear about it from Mr. Prescott tomorrow. It's a dead secret till he's pleased to speak."

"And yesterday I never thought there'd be a secret between you and me as long as we lived!"

"It's no secret of mine, Dick. And you mustn't talk like that and give up hope. Don't think that I've given up hope, because I told what I told you yesterday. Youth's the time for hope and we're both young yet. I've explained a lot to myself since yesterday. I was awake all night. I cried

for a long time; then I looked out of my window into the moonlight and wondered if you were awake too—fretting. And I guessed you were.”

“Fretting’s a small word.”

“Then suddenly, last night, I saw a man slip down the path and away. It was Mr. Prescott. He’d gone to bed as we thought; but when he reckoned we were asleep, he’d crept out of the house to go about his work. And the sight of him shamed me, Dick. I thought there was I weeping, like a child, while this plucky chap was earning his money and courting risks very likely and getting on with it. And—why I can’t say—the thought comforted me and bucked me up. He’s clever; he’s got lots of ideas; he doesn’t agree with mother about your father. He’s talked to a score of people about Mr. Rivers, and every one of them has told him that, though a passionate, short-tempered sort of man, he’d never sink to shooting a fellow creature in that cowardly way from behind. Mr. Prescott’s great on motives, you know. He says that, after character, you find your strongest clues in motives, and if you can lay bare motives, then often half the work is done.”

Richard was interested.

“That’s what I say, and what my uncle says, and what Sam Bowden says. What earthly motive exists for——”

He had forgotten the revolver, and ceased to speak when he remembered it.

“And, therefore,” continued Phyllis, “we’ve a right to hope—me and you. Hope, Dick! All through the night I felt Hope stronger—just a

bit; and I was coming to see you for a minute now—to see if you felt the same.”

“Like your fine pluck!” he said. “I wish I could rise to feel as you do. But Hope’s pretty near dead, Phyllis.”

“Then let me make it alive again. If you love me, hope, Richard.”

“The sins of the fathers——”

“Don’t condemn your own father. Don’t you be the one to fear. Trust God to bring the truth to light, if you can’t trust men to do it.”

“Yes—I suppose God Almighty will strip all bare in His own time, no matter what pains we take to hide it. But His time may be too late for us.”

They were beside a little grocer’s shop and a lad was just putting up the shutters.

“Wait for me,” she said and hastened in. She was back in five minutes.

“Now the ironmonger’s,” directed Phyllis. “Did you get Mr. Gedge to open the box you were telling us about?”

“Yes; he opened it.”

“Nothing to help?”

“Nothing to help.”

They reached another shop and Phyllis asked Richard to enter with her.

“I want two of the little electric torches for Mr. Prescott, and to get his own refilled,” she explained. Then she stopped guiltily.

“There! I wasn’t to tell anybody about that.”

“Say no more then,” advised Richard.

“Don’t you mention it either, will you?”

“Not I. But where’s the mystery?”

Phyllis made no answer; and when she had explained to the ironmonger and promised to return in twenty minutes, she walked again with the young man and they moved together along the deserted promenade. The night was mild and very dark. Rain promised soon to fall and a wind laden with moisture blew off the sea. The tide was high and they saw the grey, broken line of waves rising and falling along the shore.

“Why shouldn’t I tell you?” she asked suddenly. “You and I were one but yesterday; and we may be one again tomorrow. This is as much to you as to me—life or death. Everything may hang on the man.”

“Tell me nothing that he wouldn’t tell me himself,” answered Richard. “He’s a right to his secrets—I don’t want them.”

“As much to you as to us,” repeated Phyllis, “and you’re not one to talk. After all it’s only what was to be expected. They’d have done it when poor little Jacky Norman was strangled, only my dear father stood out against. Mr. Prescott himself didn’t see the necessity then, or push for it; because well he knew the wretch that killed that child had gone far away before they found what had happened. But now it’s different and mother’s very wishful for it too.”

“To open the tunnel?”

“Yes; but not to tell a soul he’s going to. It’ll be done tonight. Two men are coming from Bridgewater after supper, and then Mr. Prescott’s going down.”

"He believes that the Storehouse hides the mystery still?"

"He says it hides mystery of some kind. What, he doesn't know. He's got a feeling that he's watched when he goes there by somebody he can't see himself. But he wants to do the watching. More he won't say. He doesn't wish even Mr. Bowden to know."

"The tunnel will give him a private way in and out?"

"Yes, it will. And he's terrible keen to find where it opens. Dear father always doubted if the tunnel ran to the ruin at all. But nobody can say for certain. It was sealed up in my grandfather's time when father was a lad."

"I'll say nothing," promised Richard.

"And don't you ever tell him I told you either. But take hope from it. He's like a bull-dog, that man, under his pleasant, easy-going way. I've a great feeling, Dick, that he'll get to the bottom of father's death before he leaves it. And that known, your father would be proved innocent. He must be the minute the real murderer's found; and then, dead or alive, your poor father's name would be cleared."

Richard answered nothing.

"I wish he'd let you help him," she continued. "You'd be the very man to lend him a hand, so strong as you are and such a nerve."

"I'm the last he'd want. He's got no use for me."

"But he might have. Sometimes he thinks there may be more than one hid there."

"He'll be equal to anything he'll likely find I reckon. In my judgment he's wrong every way. There's nobody hid in the Storehouse. What the mischief should keep anybody there with all the world open to them?"

"I daresay he'll find the tunnel empty enough tonight."

"He's going down tonight?"

"Yes—as soon as the workmen have gone—so he says. You'll keep it a secret, won't you?"

"Trust me. I only wish he'd let me come. But I mustn't ask, for that would give you away."

She considered.

"Could you drop in casually about something after midnight?"

"No, no. He'd smell a rat. No doubt we'll hear tomorrow at the inquest all about his adventures, if he's got anything to tell."

Phyllis returned for the torches presently and Richard saw her home again and carried her parcels. Then he left her.

"You've heartened me up a bit in spite of myself," he said. "One minute I take a spark of hope from your hope; then it goes out again when I—when I look in on myself."

"Keep the spark burning as I do," begged she. "Hope can't die until it's dead. I won't be down-cast. I'll go on hoping. You can will a thing to happen, if you're strong enough and determined enough. And you well know what I will to happen—and pray to happen on my knees a dozen times a day."

"You're a wonder," he said—"too good, too fine for me, or any other chap."

"I love you," she answered, and then he watched her enter the farm, stood a moment in deep thought and turned very slowly away.

The adjourned inquest, which was resumed upon the following morning, brought many idle gossips together in addition to those whose duty it was to attend it; but not until the completion of the investigation did anything of a sensational character repay the onlookers for their wasted time.

No light was thrown upon the death of Michael Bellhanger and, incidentally, nothing could be added to the fact that George Rivers had disappeared on the night of the murder and been sought in vain. The police detailed the fruitless nature of their investigations in both cases and insisted, at the same time, on the very thorough and exhaustive character of their labours. Both Richard Rivers and his uncle were interrogated, and both swore that they had learned nothing respecting the flight of the innkeeper.

Mrs. Bellhanger was directed to be present and when, towards the end of the formal proceedings, neither she nor Raleigh Prescott were in evidence, the coroner asked to learn why they had not attended. A policeman was sent to Monks, for none present had seen Mary or the detective during that day; but Constable Walpole was but half-way up the hill to the farm when he met Mrs. Bellhanger descending alone. She was concerned but quite composed.

"I'd forgot the time," she said, "and that hap-

pened to make me forget it. I'd meant to send down sooner. Has Mr. Prescott come to the inquest?"

"No—we're hung up for him. There's nothing doing and only you and him remain to be examined."

Mary stood still and showed alarm upon her face.

"If the detective's not there, then I'm very much afraid something's happened," she said. "I'll tell the coroner what there is to tell."

In five minutes she stood as witness, but waited for a few moments to regain her composure.

"I'll ask you first," she said, "to send somebody up to Monks. My daughter's alone there, and things have happened that make me feel she oughtn't to be alone."

Mr. Bowden spoke.

"I'll go," he declared.

"And take a policeman with you," she suggested.

Then she turned to the coroner.

"It's like this. I promised Mr. Prescott not to say a word about certain things that he's doing, and I've kept my word till now; but circumstances make me feel I shouldn't be justified to do so any longer. A week ago Mr. Prescott decided to open the underground way that's known to run out under from the farm. Most people think the tunnel goes straight down to the old Storehouse, and others again, my dear late husband among them, doubted it. But Mr. Prescott judged from certain old newspapers he'd got at Bridegate, that in the

smugglers' days there was a lot doing in secret between Monks and the Store. So he ordained to look into the sealed-up tunnel, and last night two masons came from Bridegate just after midnight and went down into our cellar and moved the beer barrel and broke a hole in the wall. Only three people knew about it besides the masons themselves, because my maiden was sent home for a holiday. So only my daughter and Mr. Prescott and me know.

“The men finished their job at half after twelve o'clock, and then they had a bit of supper and went home. And, as soon as they were gone, the detective took his torch and two other torches we'd got for him last night. I believe he'd got a revolver also, but I don't know for certain as to that. He told me and my daughter, Phyllis, that it was an exploration and he didn't reckon to be away above a few hours. 'If the air turns foul, I may be back pretty soon,' he explained, but he'd been in already—for a hundred yards or thereabout—and he said the place seemed sweet enough. We looked in and saw a narrow stone-paved tunnel—dry and in good repair seemingly; and Mr. Prescott went down, flashing his light before him. It would be somewhere after one o'clock he started; but I've tried to call home the exact hour and cannot. Anyway it was between one o'clock and half past. And the last thing he said was to expect him when we saw him and no sooner.

“My daughter and I waited up till three o'clock and he didn't come back; then Phyllis wanted to take a lamp and go down after him, but I wouldn't

allow it. I reckoned that Mr. Prescott had found something to interest him and might have got out at the other end of the place—wherever it led to—and not come back that way at all. Then my daughter was a bit feared for Mr. Prescott, and thought I ought to come down to the station and tell the inspector. But I wouldn't do that either; because we'd promised not to tell the police, or anybody at all, what he was doing. And he'd warned us the last thing not to worry if he didn't return. Finally—not liking to leave the tunnel open into the house and having a sort of feeling that there was danger somewhere—I did this. I left a lamp burning on the cellar floor and put down beside it a bell—a dinner bell we use to call men from the land when a meal is ready. I wrote a line on a bit of paper and told Mr. Prescott when he got back to ring the bell and summon us. Because I knew that the sound of the bell would wake my daughter if not me. Then I went up into the house, first locking the cellar door outside as usual, so as nobody could come up without I let them do so.

“Then we went to bed—between three and four o'clock it was—and we went to sleep and nothing happened to wake us and the bell wasn't rung. We slept terrible late, being not used to such hours, and were wakened by my head man knocking and calling out at the back door with the milk at seven o'clock. Then I went down to the cellar, to find nobody had been there; but still I felt we'd better leave it alone till the inquiry. Because Mr. Prescott knew he was called to that. ‘He'll be there,’

I told Phyllis. Being so late threw everything back and my daughter reminded me at half after ten I wasn't dressed for the inquest. Then I made ready and started a bit after eleven; and when I met the policeman and he told me Mr. Prescott weren't here, I reckoned something might have happened to him, unless you'd got a telegram, or any news."

"There is no news," replied the coroner. "As you say, Mr. Raleigh Prescott was expected here and he knew it; therefore, as he has not informed me of any reason for his absence, we must assume he has been prevented from doing so."

Dr. Bull looked at his watch and proceeded in his dry, formal fashion.

"It is now a quarter to twelve and we are at the end of our inquiry, save for what may be added to it when Mr. Prescott's operations come to be explained. I will adjourn and ask the gentlemen of the jury to return here at a quarter before three o'clock. Then I trust the inquest can conclude and the verdict be recorded."

The room soon emptied and the spectators scattered with the resolution, in most cases, to return. Ten minutes later the coroner with two other policemen, Mrs. Bellhanger herself and Richard and Patrick Rivers ascended to Monks Farm.

Phyllis met them.

"Mr. Bowden and Constable Walpole have lit two lamps and gone down the tunnel," she said, "but there's been nothing heard of Mr. Prescott yet."

The party inspected the mouth of the tunnel

and the policemen desired to enter it, but the coroner bade them desist until the others should return. They ascended and Mrs. Bellhanger asked them to remain and take a rough-and-ready mid-day meal. Patrick Rivers and his nephew declined, however, and they were just returning with the police of West Haven when an excited pair of men hastened up the hill to the farm.

Inspector Bowden and Walpole appeared and the former prepared to speak. Both were covered with dust and Walpole's face had been cut. He was also very lame.

"Merciful powers, Sam!" cried Mr. Rivers, "where have you come from? We heard you'd gone down the tunnel."

"I must drink—I'm choked, and Walpole's hurt himself. There was no violence; a heavy stone fell down and fortunately scraped his cheek and no more. If it had dropped on his head it must have killed him."

They returned and Phyllis brought a jug of beer for the heroes of the moment. Then Bowden drank and spoke.

"It's all true—that the tunnel runs into the Storehouse; and it's plain to see how the last generation doubted it. For why? Because they never could find the other end. But we have. Walpole went first and I followed after. The roof of the tunnel is naked rock and the walls are dry-built of stone and the floor is paved. We must have walked in the footsteps of Prescott no doubt. It's clear enough that he found what we did and got out at the other end; but what more he found

and what's become of him since remains to be seen."

"And what did you find, Inspector?" asked the coroner.

"Just this, Sir. The tunnel runs downhill straight as a dart under the Storehouse. It has dry-built walls and the air comes through somewhere, for it's wholesome to breathe, though musty. No water—all dry as a bone. Height about eight feet perhaps. It runs downhill and opens into a square vault, or cellar, out of which a flight of steps goes straight up into a secret passage through the walls of the ruin."

"How was it, then, when the place was searched so well, that nobody found this out?"

"For a wonderful strange reason, Mister Coroner," explained Bowden. "The passage is secret. It lies in the thickness of the walls, and after you climb the steps you're in a sort of tunnel again. We went on by this channel, now up, now down, and it was after we'd been there, lost to the world for five minutes or more, that a shaft of daylight suddenly struck down from above us and we found the other end. The secret road opens high up in the great chimney shaft in the room beyond the sail-loft facing east. And thrusting his head through into the chimney shaft, Walpole gave the wall a jar with his shoulder and dislodged a tidy big stone up above somewhere, which just missed braining him.

"The opening goes right into the actual chimney fifteen or more feet up above the hearth; and doubtless it was planned so in the old days for the comfort of the 'free traders,' as the smugglers

called themselves. You might hunt the Store till doomsday and never find it, for who would look up a chimney for such a thing? But there it is and very like there's other mysteries in the place never to be known till it's pulled down.

"Well, I couldn't drop so far at my time of life; but Walpole lowered himself by his hands and let go, fell to the hearth and twisted his ankle in so doing unfortunately. When he was down, he fetched a board from the sail-loft and I descended by it. The lamps we borrowed, Miss Bellhanger, are safe there. We'll get a ladder to the place presently. And that's what we've found; and that no doubt is what Raleigh Prescottt found; but what more he found remains to be known when he comes back."

"He's been through it and gone after a clue?" asked the coroner.

"For certain; and it must be something pretty important that took him right off without a word."

Mr. Bowden was excited and had quite forgotten Walpole, who now asked if he might go home and look after his ankle.

"It's hurting terrible," he said.

"I'll send a man for a cab," suggested Phyllis, but the policeman declared he could walk. His house was not far distant.

When he had limped off, Patrick asked a question. He appeared much perturbed and his face showed anxiety rather than any jubilation at Prescottt's assumed success.

"May I speak, Mr. Coroner?" he asked.

"Certainly, Mr. Rivers, the other answered.

They were all still standing near the outer gate of Monks.

"It's like this then. What we've just heard from you, Bowden, may be quite different from what it looks. Just consider. Mrs. Bellhanger has told us that the detective went down that tunnel somewhere after one o'clock this morning. Now it's past two in the afternoon. He's been out of sight of mortal man, so far as we know, for more than twelve hours. How long did it take you and the constable, Sam, from the time you went into the tunnel to the time you left the Storehouse just now?"

"Less than an hour I reckon, Doc."

"And why should it have taken him any longer? He's quick and strong and active and wide awake. And this you know as well as I do, because Mr. Prescott didn't make any secret of his opinion. From one cause or another—little things or suspicions—he believed always that there was a man, or men, hid there. He couldn't or wouldn't say exactly why; he called it an intuition, and he relied upon intuitions, because he told Richard here, in my hearing, that intuitions have served him more than once."

"You mean that he may have tumbled into something?" asked Bowden, whose face now shared the other's doubt.

"Yes, I do. I remember my brother. He had no thought of anything wrong when he went to answer that forged letter. What George Rivers did do, or didn't do, in the Storehouse, if he ever went there, please God we'll find out some time;

but he was a victim to somebody, who took him away just when it was vital that he should be here, to throw light if he could on the death of Mr. Bellhanger. And how if this man—Prescott—going into the ruin last night secretly and by an underground way so that nobody saw him coming—how if he did what my brother may have done and got himself tangled up with villains that didn't want him? I don't say it is so; but I do say that more than twelve hours have passed since he was last seen here by Mrs. Bellhanger; and I do say, knowing the man and his businesslike ways, that it's a mighty strange thing indeed he's let the inquest go without giving any sign."

He stopped and the coroner spoke.

"I think you're right," he said. "We ought to know where he is."

"Perhaps his partner does," suggested Richard. "He might be on a trail and have forgotten all about the inquest, but telephoned, or telegraphed, to Martin Forbes at Bridegate."

"Is Martin Forbes back?" asked Bowden.

"I didn't know he was away," replied the young man.

"He's been away. He was away when Prescott came to Monks; but he may be back now."

"I can telephone to him in ten minutes," declared the inspector, "and we'd better set about another search all through the tunnels, if no news has reached the station while I've been away."

They ate some cold meat that had been prepared for them, and after a hasty meal, thanking the widow, returned to West Haven.

Dr. Bull, the coroner, gave advice to Inspector Bowden as they returned.

"Set about your search while it's light," he said. "The evenings are short now. Telephone for Inspector Garry and a few men from Bridgewater to help you, and run a cordon round the Storehouse. You don't want every fisherman and loafer in there destroying possible clues."

"And get Forbes to come down, Mr. Bowden; that is if he can't give any news," urged Richard.

"As for the inquest, that must be hung up again," added the coroner. "We'll hear first, if Martin Forbes knows anything, and if he does not, I'll adjourn at three o'clock."

Bowden, who was short-handed, asked Richard and another young man or two to get ropes and put the Storehouse out of bounds.

"Tell everybody the place is in the hands of the police and it's trespassing to go near it," he said. "I'll telephone Garry to motor down with as many as he can call together at once. And we'll put up a notice presently. If Prescott's found to be missing, then the Store must be guarded for a bit."

He telephoned presently, to be promptly answered. Forbes was at his office, but had heard nothing from his partner since the previous day, when they had talked together during the afternoon. Bowden then detailed the situation and Forbes replied that he would come instantly. As for Inspector Garry, he also undertook to hasten. Bowden rang off and returned where his party awaited him outside the police station. He was gloomy.

"Forbes don't like it," he said. "He's heard nothing, but he saw Prescott yesterday and what Prescott told him then may help. He's running down as quick as he can. And Garry will be here in ten minutes with some constables."

"No news from Prescott at the police station?" asked the coroner.

"No news, sir."

"Then it begins to look as if something was wrong," answered Dr. Bull. "I'll adjourn after I've told the jury and the two lawyers why."

"I can tell the lawyer that stands for us," said Mr. Rivers. "He'll be waiting at 'The Blue Peter.'"

The inquest was adjourned for another week, much to the annoyance of those who had to attend it; but when the coroner explained his reasons, irritation changed into re-awakened interest.

Meanwhile the Storehouse was isolated and a crowd of local people already clustered about the ropes that had been run all round it.

"There's the other end, however," said Mr. Bowden. "That's got to be watched tonight," and when his colleague arrived a few minutes later, with two motor cars and six of the police, one man was immediately despatched to Monks.

"Don't go into the tunnel; but stop in the cellar," directed Mr. Bowden.

A moment later a motor bicycle flashed down the road from Bridegate and Martin Forbes joined the police.

They waited to learn if he had any knowledge

of his partner's probable movements, but he knew no more than they.

"Time's pressing," he said with military swiftness. "He saw me yesterday—told me he was opening the tunnel last night and going down. And we know that's what he's done. Get to it. I'll go to the Monks' end and work down myself. Walk along with me, Mr. Bowden, and tell me what you know."

The inspector detailed his recent adventures as once more he ascended the hill to the farm; and it is to be feared that he also took the credit for certain practical suggestions which had followed, but for which his friend, the veterinary surgeon, had to be thanked rather than himself. But that often happens to men of the stamp of Patrick Rivers. They lose credit which by right they could claim, and noisier folk are quick to snap it up.

The newcomer took a very grave view of the situation.

"There's something all wrong here," he declared. "Raleigh told me yesterday that he felt sure the ruin was being used. 'Someone's harbouring there,' he said. Then what has happened? If he surprised wrong uns, he'd stop them, or they'd stop him. The only alternative is that there was nobody. But, in that case, my partner would be here. And if he'd stopped them he'd be here."

"This means they've stopped him then?"

"I'm afraid so, Bowden."

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM the beginning of his investigation a profound conviction possessed Martin Forbes that at West Haven and within narrow boundaries he must seek his vanished partner.

Forbes was of a different mind and temperament from Raleigh Prescott. He enjoyed a larger intellectual outlook, a deeper knowledge of human nature and a shrewder judgment of character than his older friend. He had lived a full life and found time to love and to wed. But the bonds of understanding and common admiration between himself and Prescott were of the deepest. They had worked together for nearly ten years and understood one another's methods and principles in a manner that proved very fruitful of results. Each brought his own qualities to the partnership. Fear they did not know; but physical bravery was the least essential of their calling and, united, their peculiar vision again and again achieved success that both declared had been impossible to either without the other.

Forbes from the first had proposed to assist his colleague in the case of Michael Bellhanger. He now stood free and had only awaited Prescott's next report to learn every particular of the problem and concentrate upon it. Now this unexpected complication had deprived him of

his friend. He was not a pessimist, but a sense of very serious evil hung heavily upon him from the hour of Prescott's disappearance. Linking the event with Bellhanger's curious murder and Raleigh's own conviction, that the Storehouse was not untenanted, Forbes found himself exceedingly anxious and uneasy.

In person he displayed a well covered and well knit frame; while his face was distinguished by the brow alone. He had a broad, finely moulded forehead, dark brown hair, already growing thin, and a meditative rather than alert expression. His eyes suggested the thinker, not the man of affairs; but his mouth showed determination. It was ugly and thin-lipped and revealed a strong character, though hardly a noble one. One might have judged Martin Forbes a miser—perhaps not quite unreasonably, for he was fond of money and could drive a hard bargain. He argued that what he had to sell was a very special commodity, and he preferred to work for rich people. He was just but something of a cynic, though when with his wife and his two little girls, this attitude never appeared; and in connection with his partner Forbes had always been at his best. He had respected and admired Prescott, and perhaps envied him a more generous attitude to human nature than he himself revealed. Genuine affection existed between them and now the conviction that something very wrong had happened to separate him from his friend stung the detective and challenged all his energies.

He regretted that another rather than himself had followed Prescott on his last known expedition through the tunnel, for now, concerned to gather the least trace of his vanished friend, he suspected that Bowden and Walpole in their passage had possibly obliterated important clues. Obedient to the inspector's direction he worked slowly through the tunnel, followed the ramifications of the secret passage and, hidden within them, sometimes stopped to listen. He could distinctly hear the police at work, and at one place, where the concealed way ran behind two walls at the bottom of a narrow stair, the voices were distinguishable. Two men were talking of Prescott and speaking friendly words concerning himself.

"If it's in mortal power to get to the bottom of this job, you bet Forbes will do it," said a policeman.

Quick to avail himself of any possible assistance, Forbes marked the spot where evidently the walls were thin. Then, to prove if his voice could reach them as easily, he waited for a pause in their conversation and lifted his own.

"Can you hear me in there?" he asked, but for a moment the others were evidently too astonished to reply. Then he spoke again, keeping his voice at conversational pitch.

"Can you chaps hear me speaking?"

"It's Mr. Forbes!" exclaimed somebody and then proclaimed himself.

"Yes, sir—we can hear you."

"Who are you?"

“P. C. Jennings from Bridegate and P. C. Webster, West Haven.”

“Resting from your labours?”

There was a laugh but no answer.

“Where are you?” inquired the detective.

“In a small room beyond the sail-loft, sir,” replied the second voice.

“Come to the wall, then put a mark on it where you hear me knock.”

“Right, sir.”

Forbes, little guessing at the ultimate significance of this slight precaution, proceeded. He followed the devious way of the secret passage and though no light from above indicated the end of the journey, since it was now nearly dark, he found himself presently at the outlet in the chimney. A shout from here brought immediate attention and he was assisted to the hearth below.

Nothing had been seen of Raleigh Prescott, and none of the searchers reported anything in the nature of a clue. Every known corner and chamber of the old Store was ransacked, the lumber turned over, the doubtful holes and rents examined. Forbes himself assisted at this task and so refreshed his memory with a general idea of the plan. But already he perceived the possibilities concealed must be endless and he judged that there might be, among the aged inhabitants of West Haven, not a few antiquated men, and perhaps women, who knew more, or had forgotten more, than the police were likely to discover. The huge, ruinous mass of bricks and mortar might contain a dozen oubliettes, closets and hiding-

places, of which the tunnel to Monks was only one; a hundred forgotten secrets might well be concealed within the height and depth of such a pile. What of crypts below the earth, or retreats and refuges above?

Inspector Bowden voiced something of the detective's doubts when presently they met.

"It's a hopeless job," he said. "You might as well hunt a mouse in a corn stack. We'll never get to the bottom of this damned ruin till it's pulled down and not a stone's left on another. I've always said so and always asked to have it done. But of course the Parish Council can't afford it, and there's nobody will do it for the value of the material."

At ten o'clock on that night the hunt was called off and the weary police returned to Bridegate. Then Forbes, fetching his motor bicycle from the police station, called at "The Blue Peter" and asked to see Richard Rivers. The young man was in the bar and presently he sat with Prescott's friend and received some directions.

"I'm going home now to eat my supper and put some things together," said Forbes. "Then, if there's no news of my pal waiting at the office, I shall come back here and put up with you for a bit. I can work from here very well. If you'd rather I didn't stop in your house, you must say so. This is a very bad job in my opinion and no man can tell yet where it's going to end. But if there's anybody here that knows anything—in West Haven I mean—then I don't leave till I've found it out; and if there's people hid

in the Storehouse, we've got to catch 'em, or bolt 'em."

"I'd be very glad for you to stop here," answered Richard. "This affair of Mr. Prescott bears on the other no doubt. If Prescott's got caught, then all the more likelihood that my father's got caught. They may be both all right and only waiting for the police to find them."

"They may," admitted the other; "but I don't think it. As to your father I'll not speak yet. That's why I said I won't come here if you'd rather not. If anything I'm against your father—remember that."

"I'll welcome the truth whatever it is," answered Dick; but his heart gave him the lie as he spoke, and something in the tone of his voice made Forbes regard him more closely. He saw a haggard young man with habitual down-drawn brows and the mark of much mental suffering upon his face. But he agreed to come.

"Make ready for me and put a fire in my room and see the bed's well aired," he said. "If there's news, I'll telephone to Bowden; but I don't expect any tonight. I'll probably be back about twelve o'clock."

He departed and, punctual to his promise, was back in West Haven upon the stroke of midnight. From the following day and for several days Martin Forbes devoted himself entirely to the ruin; but his study of details produced no reward. The place could not be wholly shut off from those whose labour brought them here, nor did Forbes feel the need. After the first twenty-four hours

he was very willing to let the people come and go upon their lawful occasions, for he suspected that if, indeed, men lay in hiding beyond reach of his scrutiny, others knew it from outside, and by watching them he might win any secret that existed. Fishermen had the usual access to their gear in the lower chambers; the labourers, who brought sand from the beach in carts, and others, whose business it was to screen the sand and separate the coarse from the fine, all proceeded about their business, and sometimes Forbes would ostentatiously depart from the chamber wherein he had taken up his quarters. There came and went dumb Joe Baggs to his lobster-pots and fishing-lines; while Ernest Norman, the father of the murdered child, and others were mending a large boat drawn up above high tide level on the east of the Store. With Norman the detective enjoyed some lengthy conversations, for none knew the old building better than he. After Jacky's death he had haunted the place, and though Forbes was not aware that his vanished friend had been particularly interested in this man, he, himself, recognised something strange about him. Questioning others, however, he learned a natural cause for his peculiarity. It appeared that Ernest had been sane enough before his loss, but that afterwards, he developed curious features of character. His mind was not unhinged, but he had changed from a cheerful being into a morose and gloomy one.

Norman knew no more than others; but the Store interested him more than most and he spent much of his time in prowling the empty rooms and

climbing the rotten staircases that connected one storey with another. Forbes had the man watched for some time by the police, who assisted him; but nothing resulted from their scrutiny. Bowden and his staff still worked privately in connection with the detective, although ostensibly they were drawn off after a week had passed. Local constables familiar to the natives went upon their beats as usual; but for a time two plain-clothes detectives from Great Scotland Yard visited West Haven and, in private understanding with Forbes, spent their time in the neighbourhood of the Storehouse and in study of those who came and went from it.

Prescott's friend had chosen a centre in the web of the ruin and spent a large part of his days there. It was the room wherein he had heard the police talking that he chose to occupy—that chamber behind the wall of which the secret passage ran; and here he had brought a table and two chairs for his convenience. He had explored the tunnel from Monks also and learned that Mrs. Bellhanger grew restive under present conditions and was inviting Inspector Bowden to let the hole in the wall be rebuilt. He saw her, explained that this could not immediately be done; but promised the work should not be delayed longer than he deemed necessary.

"Then I'll go," she said. "It's getting on my nerves, though not till my husband lost his life did I know that I had nerves. I'll leave here, if you please, for a while and hand the place over to the police till you can finish this business. I've

decided to leave Monks in any case after Ladyday. Then it will be in the market; because I'm no farmer and can't carry on."

He approved her suggestion, and presently Monks was empty and the key in Mr. Bowden's possession. The cellars were visited daily and more than once Forbes came to Monks by way of the tunnel, or returned to the Storehouse through it. Close survey of the subterranean passage had told him nothing. There were no branches or indications of any other outlet save that high in the chimney, where Bowden and Walpole had originally emerged. The tunnel was of dry-built stone under a roof of living rock. Everything was solid and no pit props occurred at any point.

Sitting alone in the chamber he had chosen, on a day a week after Prescott's disappearance, there came a visitor to Martin Forbes, and Patrick Rivers entered.

"I guessed you would be here," he said, "for I know you keep at the heart of things. I could have seen you at the hotel; but I'm very wishful to get half an hour with you alone, Forbes—somewhere out of the way. If you're busy now I'll come again; or if you can come up to my house, where we shan't be disturbed."

The detective had seen a good deal of Richard Rivers and studied him very closely: but with his uncle he had not yet talked save in the company of other men. As for Dick, he began to like him and, on hearing of the recent broken engagement, piled upon the young man's other tribulations, felt a measure of sorrow for him. None the less

he did not as yet trust him with his own opinions, or hold him as beyond possibility of suspicion. Richard was one of the many more or less interested in the things that had happened; and the task of elimination had not yet begun in the mind of Forbes, since to work out the possible relations and interests of the local people interested in this mystery still remained to be done. He had already considered the veterinary surgeon and contemplated his possible significance. He was not sorry to come into closer contact with him and perceived at once that his visitor felt disturbed.

It was noon when Patrick entered the Storehouse and bright sunlight fell upon the sand without and gilded the yellow cliffs which towered beyond. For the shattered window of this chamber faced east.

"Sit down," said Forbes. "Now will do as well as another time, Mr. Rivers. I'm not busy. I wish I was."

Patrick took the empty chair. He looked worn and anxious, for a load apparently weighed upon him and it was more than he could endure to bear it single-handed any longer. He wasted no words but approached at once the matter that brought him.

"I've done wrong," he said, "a great wrong. I did it in a moment of impulse you must know, and I wouldn't let myself think of it after. But you can't put a thing out of your mind if it refuses to go."

"Why d'you come to me?" asked the other,

lighting his pipe, and flinging a piece of blotting paper over the letter he was engaged upon. For he brought a despatch box daily to the Store and pursued his business there.

"That I can hardly tell you, except that I've watched you at work and I trust you," answered the other. "First I thought to take it to parson, who's a very good man and knows the world. I thought that, because it's a matter of conscience really."

He lifted his anxious eyes to the listener; but Forbes did not speak.

"Then," continued Mr. Rivers, "I turned to Sam Bowden, our inspector. He's a life-long friend of mine and I felt he was the man. For that matter, no doubt you'll tell him if I don't. But, somehow, I felt it had gone too far to tell him. And then for a bit I set my teeth in it and swore I wouldn't tell anybody—for family reasons. And then—last night—came in my mind the thought to tell you."

Forbes nodded.

"You know who you're telling, Mr. Rivers. I won't accept a confidence, or promise not to use anything you may say, even to your family's detriment, if it's got anything to do with this business. I'd hang every man in West Haven gladly, who had laid a finger on Prescott—yourself included."

"No," answered Patrick; "it's not a hanging matter; but it was a serious matter, and it's because it cast a very dark light on one who was dear to me that I did what I did. But I've come to see it was a wrong thing. I couldn't convince

myself it would make any difference till the inquest had passed, and the business of Prescott's disappearance helped to put it out of my head that day. But, afterwards, I felt what I'd done. Then it got home on me and finally I decided for you."

Forbes looked at the speaker intently and saw not only trouble, but something that he judged might be remorse on his face.

"You've withheld evidence," he said, and the elder nodded.

"Just exactly that. And for an extenuating circumstance, Mr. Forbes, I'd say, before I go on, that my brother, George, is more to me—far more than anybody on God's earth. However, that's my business and the fact should not have led me into wrong. I don't know what it means, mind you. I may, instead of helping him, have hindered him by hiding it. There!"

He took a revolver from his pocket and put it down in front of the detective.

Martin Forbes examined the weapon.

"An old-fashioned Derringer—out of date long ago. Loaded, but one chamber empty. Tell me about it."

"There was a little, ancient, iron strong box in my brother's office," explained Patrick, "and there it is yet. It was always locked and the two keys hung by the chimney mantel in the room. But, after George disappeared, we found the keys had gone, when we came to look over everything. My nephew sent for a smith, and a man by the name of Gedge came and opened it. But Dick was

busy just then and he asked me to look through the papers in the box. I did so. I was alone when I did it, after my nephew and I had our dinner together. Then he went to Bridegate and I turned out the box. It was full of used-up ledgers and a used-up visitors' book. There wasn't anything else in it apparently; but at the bottom, under the last of the old ledgers, I found that. It knocked me out for the minute. I put it into my pocket and told myself I'd decide about it later. Then I stuck the books back in the box and shut it. And then I started to go to Bowden. But I didn't. I couldn't. I went home and hid the revolver and said and did nought about it—till now."

"You said nothing to anybody?"

"To one person I lied. Next time I saw my nephew, he asked me if I'd found anything in the box, and I said I had found nothing but the old books—nothing to help the case."

Forbes was silent for a full two minutes and the other left him to consider. Then the detective asked a few questions.

"Was your nephew with the smith when he opened the box?"

"Yes, he was."

"And with the box afterwards?"

"He might have been."

"Where were you when the box was opened?"

"At work. I came in here by appointment and dined with Dick at one o'clock."

"And he was in the office when you got to him?"

"Yes; that's right. He was writing letters."

"And hadn't looked at the box, but left it for you to do?"

"Yes."

"So he said."

Forbes was silent again and renewed anxiety showed itself on the other's face. His mind appeared to anticipate the next question, for he spoke.

"You needn't bother about Richard. The point is that I kept back evidence and I must suffer, if anybody does. He knew nothing about it; and he still knows nothing about it. George Rivers was his father, remember."

But the other paid no heed to this remonstrance.

"I must see him as to time—unless you can answer with certainty. The point, Mr. Rivers, is this. Your nephew was in the office with the open box. Was he there long enough to have looked into the box himself?"

"I couldn't tell you—perhaps not."

The elder grew agitated again.

"You mean he might have seen this thing?"

"I mean rather more than that. However, you've been straight. I'll ask you to say nothing about this to your nephew, or anybody else, till you've seen me again. Will you promise that? I'll take your word; and that's pretty generous under the circumstances."

"He's my own nephew, Mr. Forbes, and as straight a man as walks this earth."

"He may be. I've nothing against him. I'm only here for one reason now, and I've got no down on any mortal man so far; but I must cer-

tainly see Richard Rivers before you do. You'll grant that is pretty obvious."

"Yes—if you can honestly think he knows anything about it. I promise not to see him. I'm on my way to the country now in my car. I shan't be back till after nightfall."

"That's all right then. I'll see you at your house tonight—late. Be in if you can."

"I'll be in unless I'm called to a case."

"Thank you. You've done the right thing and I'll promise you this. I'll only see your nephew for the present. Nobody else shall know about the revolver. But he's going to—he's got to. He may have seen it before, which you had not I presume?"

"Never," said Mr. Rivers. Then, as he got up, the elder looked at Forbes and spoke once more.

"You're a great judge of character. You read through people and they can't hide anything from you—that's the name and fame you've got. Then read him right. He's clean. I've known him from his birth and never caught him in one act to shame himself, or his people."

"Trust me," answered the other not unkindly, and after he had shut his despatch box, locked it and picked it up, they left the Storehouse together. Mr. Rivers rode off immediately and the detective proceeded to "The Blue Peter." He was free of the place and went where he pleased; now, therefore, he strolled into the office and found it empty. But the old muniment chest had not been moved and he examined it. He was doing so when Richard entered.

"A fine box, Dick," said the guest amiably.

"Is it, Mr. Forbes?" asked Richard. "I know I've bruised my shins on it once or twice. Father picked it up at a sale and he valued it a lot."

"Did he keep anything of any importance in it?"

"No—only old ledgers and such like. We opened it and went through it after his disappearance."

"Who went through it?"

"Uncle Patrick."

"You haven't?"

"Yes, I have—since my uncle did."

Martin Forbes looked round to see that the door was shut. Then, suddenly, he brought the old Derringer out of his pocket and held it under Richard's observation. He fixed his eyes on the young man's face as he did so, and though Dick's features did not change and he kept his nerve, the suddenly increasing pumping of his powerful young heart sent a wave of colour over his face.

"Come—be straight, Dick. Have you seen that before?"

"Yes," answered Dick, "I have."

Forbes nodded.

"Mr. Rivers had just brought it to me," he said. "Your uncle found it in that chest, at the bottom, and guessing, no doubt, that his brother hid it there before he cleared out, his heart failed him and he took it and suppressed it. Then turning the matter over and finding he could trust me, he brought it to me half an hour ago with the story

of where he found it. Now you tell me your bit, Richard. And tell the truth, there's a good lad."

To his surprise the young man smiled, but he explained his apparent amusement, seeing that the other was in no mood for laughter.

"I'm thinking of Uncle Patrick. I might have known he could never keep a secret like that. I'm very glad he's told you, Mr. Forbes. I ought to have told him and Mr. Bowden before the inquest, but something turned me into a coward. It was a tremendous shock, because I'd always convinced myself that my father had no hand in the death of Mr. Bellhanger. And it meant even more to me personally. Yet, of course, this—— The honest truth is that I had looked through the box after it was opened and before my uncle joined me. Then something prompted me to let him find it instead of me. It was on the spur of the moment—to leave it to him. I acted a lie, and I told one for that matter; because I asked him to turn out the box and said I hadn't done so."

Forbes nodded.

"You weren't tempted to take and hide the revolver then?"

"No. I didn't feel that way. I didn't think of it. Perhaps if I had, I should have done what he did. But for some cowardly sort of reason I can't understand now, I reckoned I'd just leave it for him to find and decide about."

"Did you calculate what he was likely to do when he had found it?"

"I knew he'd see, of course, what it meant, and

hoped he would do away with it. Yes—honestly—I guessed he would. He thought a lot of my father.”

“And what d’you say now?”

“I’m glad he owned up, Mr. Forbes, though it makes me and him out rather poor figures. I’m glad he’s handed it over. This isn’t a time for pretending.”

“Did you ever see the revolver before you found it in the box?”

“No, I’d never set eyes on it before.”

“Then you don’t associate it with your father?”

“No; and if I’d remembered, when I came upon it, that it didn’t follow it was father’s because it was there—if I’d remembered that, I shouldn’t have been such a fool as to leave it there and lie to my uncle. But I only thought of that afterwards.”

“This room’s not particularly private then?”

“Oh, no. People were always in and out, and still are. The bar-maid, the potman, the ostler and sometimes visitors, or commercial travellers to see father—they come and go. It was a sort of public office.”

“When did you miss the keys?”

“Three or four days after father disappeared. Then I was working through everything, because Bowden told me to do so. And he himself reminded me of the iron box. He was here himself a good bit, of course. Then I looked for the keys and found them gone.”

“Nobody had discovered they were missing sooner?”

"Nobody that I heard of. They weren't mentioned to me."

Forbes was disposed to believe this story, for to his judgment it bore a stamp of truth. But it did not convince him. He possessed one theory that embraced Richard Rivers. He had learned on all hands that father and son were bad friends, and that only the good offices of the uncle sufficed to prevent an open breach on more than one occasion. For all his apparent frankness, there was something formidable about the young athlete. His immense strength was obvious. But his face, though gloomy, had no criminal suggestion. Nothing shifty marked his direct glance. His countenance showed discipline and self-control; and when the frown lifted and he smiled, there was something not unattractive in his eyes.

"For the minute I'll keep this thing and see if I can get any information concerning it. You found no more ammunition?"

"No—not a cartridge," answered Richard.

"All right, then. I'll say nothing just yet, and you can say nothing. I believe you've told me the facts—you alone know if you have, Richard; and be sure I shall know, too, sooner or later. I understand how this looked to you and Mr. Rivers. I don't blame you much, but I'm glad that he owned up, and that you did. I see him tonight. Now come and have your dinner with me."

They ate together presently, and Richard, who could not forget the revolver, found himself elated, yet wondered to feel this sense of better spirits,

till he traced it to a remark the detective had made.

Seeking to substantiate this, he asked a question.

"You wouldn't say, then, that the revolver must be my father's, or need have been fired by him?"

"Impossible to assert any such thing. Remember that nobody saw your father that evening before the train went. Now that's in his favour, because if we could prove that he hadn't come back here after meeting Mr. Bellhanger, but gone to the station straight from the Storehouse, that would mean—whether the revolver had anything to do with the farmer's death or not—it wasn't put there by George Rivers. But, though he wasn't seen here, it can't be proved that he didn't come back here. It can't even be proved he went to the Store at all. We must look at probability, however. That's on his side, because the probability would be that if he'd killed Bellhanger with it, he would not have had the least wish to keep the revolver, or hide it where it must, sooner or later, be found. He was going out of his way to rush back here and deliberately hide the weapon and take the keys. Murderers do silly things, and you might argue that was just such a silly thing as a murderer would do; but it isn't. He'd have been far more likely to take the revolver with him and fling it out of the train window, when he was passing deep water somewhere. He would know, between here and Knighton, just how to do that."

“Then you’d say some other hand might have put the revolver there? There’s hope?”

“Yes—nothing is certain. Another hand seems more likely to have planted it.”

“I’ll turn that over,” answered the young man, his face brightened by the first ray of hope that had dawned upon it for many days. “I might help you there. I’ll think of all the people who come and go.”

“You can. Try and remember what happened just after your father disappeared and before my partner came down.”

Secretly rejoiced by an opportunity to be of service, Richard promised to devote thought upon the subject. Then Forbes returned to the Storehouse and stopped to talk to some of the fishermen outside it.

That night he kept his promise and visited Patrick Rivers. He found him busy with a fox-hound, which had been badly torn by barbed wire during the morning. He did not conceal his astonishment at hearing Richard had seen the revolver, but was much relieved to know that Martin Forbes believed the young man’s story.

“Apparently he thought exactly as you tell me you thought,” said Forbes. “At a first glance, of course, it looks as though your brother, and none else, put the revolver there, but I may tell you I’m not one of those who think that George Rivers killed Bellhanger. You and your nephew would be prejudiced, naturally, in his favour, and I discount all you might have to say—up to a point; but when you brought me that revolver, you

didn't still think your brother shot the farmer, if ever you did think it."

Patrick nodded.

"I'll put this hound in my hospital kennels and come back," he said. But Martin followed him and saw the wounded creature comfortably settled for the night in a shed behind the veterinary surgeon's house.

"He'll soon be all right," said Mr. Rivers. Then he returned to his parlour and admitted that the other's supposition was correct.

"Your partner said a very wise and true thing," he continued. "He put character first, and held where facts were doubtful and you had nothing but circumstantial evidence to go upon, then character should be taken into account. And my brother George's character was such that you'll not find a man in Dorset, who knew him, grant that he could have committed a foul and cowardly murder."

"Yes, Prescott always set much store on character: he learned that through me, and through experience. But while there's some men you may say couldn't commit a murder, there's others you may say couldn't be murdered—unless it was, of course, murder with robbery by rascals out for gain, who didn't know anything about their victim. Such a man was Michael Bellhanger. A harmless, friendly character, a little important and pleased with himself by all accounts, but certainly not a man to create bitter enmities, or awaken in anybody a passion capable of destroying him."

"That's true," answered Patrick. "Not a very

clever man, but well-meaning and amiable. Besides, he was going to be a great gainer by my brother. Bellhanger much wanted his land and was willing to pay him his price. There would have been a sum of three thousand pounds pass—perhaps a little more.”

“I’ve looked into his life and so has Mrs. Bellhanger, though she says to her knowledge he had no secrets. But his papers certainly show none.”

“The same with my brother. Nothing to indicate a serious enemy. And how, if I may ask, was it with Raleigh Prescott? Did you know him well enough to say if he had no enemies, either?”

“He had enemies, as I have enemies and as any man who does our work may have enemies. They tried to poison him once; and one chap sent him a Lewis hand grenade, so packed that if he’d opened it, he must have been killed. But that’s all in the game. He had no private enemies.”

“About the revolver, Mr. Forbes?”

“For the present, say nothing. If your brother didn’t put it there, somebody else did, and that somebody must be wondering a good bit why nothing has been heard of it. A clue might come out of that.”

They went out together presently, and while Forbes returned to “The Blue Peter” for the night, Patrick Rivers called on Samuel Bowden to see the Great Dane.

Mr. Bowden lived in a little villa overlooking the sea, and presently he entertained his friend.

“A spot of whiskey,” he said. “These are trou-

blesome times and I hate for West Haven to be the centre of a mystery that nobody can clear. If we'd got to the bottom of it, Pat, and covered ourselves with glory and proved, once for all, that your poor brother was an innocent man and so on, then, well and good; but now we stand before the nation as failures."

"If men like Prescott and Forbes can do nothing, you needn't blame yourself."

"Between ourselves," said the inspector, "I don't think Forbes is much cleverer than anybody else. It's the same with doctors—specialists are bluffers half the time. I'd never trust one. Martin Forbes has not gone a step further to clearing this up than Prescott did before him, or we did before Prescott. There's a catch in it, as they say; and if you ask me, I believe the whole mystery has been tackled wrong from the first."

"So I think," answered the other. "Prescott was somehow hoodwinked to his doom, in my opinion, and I believe, if we knew where my brother was now, we should know where Prescott was. We ought to take the war into the enemy's country, Samuel."

"That's all right, but how to do it? What is the enemy's country?"

"The Storehouse is the enemy's country," said Mr. Rivers. "That's where the enemy is, safe as a spider at the bottom of his web, or a badger in his holt. We want to draw him, or else bolt him. We can't draw him—we've proved that. His earth is too deep. But, in my opinion, we might bolt him."

"We could only bolt him by pulling down the blessed Storehouse to the roots."

"We could bolt him by strategy," declared the other. "We could say we were going to pull it down. We could even have a lot of men turned on for a day or two, and actually start to pull it down. Then, assuming the murderer, or murderers, are there, they'd know their number was up and very likely run into the nets you'd secretly set for them. Of course, there'd be no question of pulling down the place really, but it would be just as effective if everybody thought we were going to, and if we actually set about as if we were. Just a plot, Sam. People would talk, and the rumour would soon get to those we want, because I'll lay my life they are being helped from outside."

Bowden was doubtful.

"I wasn't one who ever felt very sure there was anybody hid there—though after Prescott disappeared I changed my mind. Somebody was there when he went down the tunnel, but I'd bet a good bit there's nobody there now."

"You may be right. It seems hard to think, after the way Forbes has been over it, that there can be. And if there is, what is he waiting for?"

"We might let on we were going to pull all down, but we must give a good reason for it—a likely reason, else people won't believe it," continued Bowden. "Perhaps I'll put that to Martin Forbes. People wouldn't believe it was going to be destroyed just because we said so. But we might invent a good sounding reason and let

rumour spread it abroad. Rumours don't cost money to fling broad-cast, and a falsehood has often caught a rascal, though it's a tricky bait and not to be used often."

CHAPTER IX

INSPECTOR BOWDEN took occasion on the following day to propose Patrick's suggestion in the ear of Martin Forbes. He hedged as to the source of his inspiration until he found the detective disposed to approve it, then the inspector claimed it as his own and took the credit.

"It won't cost a penny," he explained, "and the moment it's whispered, everybody will delight to speed the news. The only difficulty is to find a reason that people will credit. It isn't enough that these dark things have happened, Forbes. There must be some better reason that will sound good."

The other admitted that.

"It's one thing to bolt a weasel and another to catch him when he is bolted, Inspector. That might bolt him, certainly, but can we organise in such a way that he bolts into our hands? The vastness of the place is what makes me feel rather hopeless, though I still think we're dealing with something hid at our elbows. I feel that, just as my friend Prescott felt it before me. We can try this, anyway. Something may come of it. I'll think of a good tale to tell the people. There's such a number revolve round the Storehouse, and some might help, and, no doubt, some would hinder

if they had the chance. It's a case where I'm doubtful where to pick friends and who to trust. And yet I begin to see that, unless I can get a few loyal helpers on my side, I'm not going to clear this."

"Everybody's your side, Forbes."

"Not a chance! There's some against me. I don't know one to name—I wish I did, for if I knew one fixed enemy working against you and myself—if I knew for certain one man, or woman, who was opposed to us, then I might make such a person a stepping-stone. But this trick you suggest might throw a little light. I'll hit on an idea in twenty-four hours."

Mr. Bowden found himself much impressed with the thought of enemies at hand.

"That's an uncomfortable idea and I'm not with you," he said. "Every soul in West Haven wants this thing cleared for the honour and credit of the place."

"Nonsense! There's no sentiment about it, though there may be money in it for a blackguard here and there. What about the fishermen? D'you know any of them for doubtful characters? I suppose they are the children and the grandchildren of the old smugglers, and they may have had secrets handed down to them and know a bit more than you do," suggested Forbes.

"Not them. They're a poor and ignorant lot. They've been frightened by these things as much as anybody. Your mate, Raleigh Prescott, was interested in them, too—specially in Joe Baggs,

the dumb man, and Ernest Norman. But what should they do? Joe can hear; he can't answer except on his fingers. He's a harmless blade and a good, keen fisherman, but I've never known a word said against him. As for poor Norman, since his child was done in, he's got a bee in his bonnet. No, you needn't look for any secrets among the fishermen."

"Meet me here tomorrow," answered the other. "Drop in about ten and I'll see if we can start a yarn that the people will believe. Meantime, say nothing to anybody."

Bowden left the Storehouse and Forbes, lighting a pipe, strolled the empty chambers with his hands in his pockets and turned his attention to the new problem. To invent a story was not difficult to his order of mind. The tale must bear the stamp of truth and yet be such that an inquisitive public could not investigate it too closely.

Before the end of the day he had concocted the needful romance and was satisfied in one direction, though doubtful in another.

He communicated all to Bowden on the following morning, when Samuel arrived punctually.

They sat in the central chamber of the Storehouse, where still Forbes spent no little time.

"You know the Red Field, don't you?" he began.

"Sure! All the trouble started there."

"Well, I took a turn over it yesterday. I went down the tunnel again in the afternoon—starting from this end and coming up in Monks. Nothing

doing there. Then I looked at the field. Now wouldn't you say it would be a very fine site for a gentleman's house?"

"Certainly. You might put a tip-top house there and lay out fine grounds."

"Let us announce, then, that somebody is going to do so. Now what would be the first thing such a man might object to?"

Mr. Bowden reflected.

"That I can't guess," he answered.

"He'd look around him and see beautiful views away to Golden Cap in the west, up over the chalk downs easterly, and the open sea in front. But when he looked for a real, fine, uninterrupted sea-view, the first thing that struck him would be the Storehouse—that great, ugly lump heaved up in his line of sight and spoiling the run of the beach and the free view of the bay."

"Good!" said Samuel. "So he would."

"Then, being a rich man—a war profiteer to whom money was no object—he'd say, 'That hateful ruin must come down, else my fine view to seaward's spoiled.' Well, what next? Nobody wants the Storehouse. It's easy to put up a shelter and look-out for the fishermen nearer the pier heads, where it would be much handier for them. Everyone in West Haven would be only too delighted if the ruin was away. So there you are. The rich man is going to pull down the Store first thing and use a lot of the material for his new house up the hill. Don't that all fit in?"

"Fine!" said Mr. Bowden. "What a brain you've got, Forbes."

"We turn a few men on to the Red Field, and they run in a lot of stakes and fix up a flag or two, as if they were surveying. Then everybody hears that the ground is sold and that the first thing to happen will be the demolition of this place. The rich man's in the deuce of a hurry, and the house-breakers are coming down, two hundred strong, to set to work."

"The news will run like fire," said Mr. Bowden. "And of course nothing won't be done, really."

"Now for the other side," continued Forbes. "To do this we must take one or two into the secret, and the one man I don't want to know is the very first who'd have to."

"There's only Richard Rivers must know. He'd take care not to give it away."

"And he's the very one I don't want to know, Bowden."

"Richard! Why not? You don't mean——"

"I don't mean anything. I only remember that while we've got nothing against anybody yet, we've got nothing for anybody. I couldn't swear on my oath that Rivers knows nothing."

The inspector stared.

"You do astonish me," he answered. "What might he have done, then? What has he got out of this evil?"

"Nothing that we can see. But how little we can see. Think. If George Rivers is dead, then I suppose his son is his heir. They didn't love one another, but I haven't heard there's any reason to suppose Dick wouldn't inherit. Well, that's a reason."

“As a matter of fact,” said the other, “Richard knows nothing about the will. Him and his uncle wanted to hear it and the lawyer wouldn’t let them. He said it was much too soon to touch the will.”

“There you are, then. He was interested.”

“Who wouldn’t be? He had to get money to carry on the public house and he’s having it. But go on. I’m terrible astonished you can think there’s anything wrong with him.”

“I wouldn’t say I do. In fact, I do not—not yet. But suppose there was? If we told him this, of course all our trouble’s wasted—assuming he’s in the know of it.”

“Put him out of your mind,” urged Bowden. “I’ll go bail for him. He’s as straight and honourable a man as you’ll find on earth, Forbes. The reason why George Rivers and Dick were out is easily told, and you’ve heard all about it and it’s all on the surface.”

“You don’t honestly think he’s had anything to do with this?”

“I’d willingly take my oath of it. He’s no more capable of such work as we’ve got here than you are. Find the man who has a grudge against Richard and I’ll give you fifty pounds.”

“I’d like to believe you. I’ve studied him very close and I see only his hang-dog face against him. Prescott studied him close, too. The last time ever I saw Raleigh, he’d just been with young Rivers. For a bit he doubted—he told me that; but he was clear in his mind about him at Bridegate on the twenty-third of November.”

"Believe me, you're wasting time to suspect in that quarter; but, of course, I don't hold no case for him. I'm only telling you what I know and everybody knows."

"If we trust him, then, this plan's still good?"

"For certain. A great thought."

"I'll chance it, then. We'll see him now."

They went together to "The Blue Peter" and in half an hour Richard had grasped the plot.

He was puzzled, but presently perceived the detective's drift.

"The point is to give out that the Red Field is sold, for building a private house, and the Store has got to be pulled down at once?" he asked.

"Yes; and tell everybody as though you believed it," advised Mr. Bowden. "And keep awake, so as you shan't be caught out, Dick. You may bet some press man from Bridegate will call you up on the telephone, or come to see you, as soon as it's known. They'll want to hear who's bought the land and all about him. But just you say the purchaser wishes the thing to be kept quiet for the present."

"I'd best to tell Mr. Secretan, anyway," answered young Rivers. "If he hears about it, he'll very likely tell me I've got no right to sell. It isn't mine for that matter. It's my father's still for all we know different."

"By the time they begin to go into details, we shall have succeeded or failed," explained Forbes. "It's just worth trying and no more. I don't expect much from it. But we may bring something off. Never mind details. Tell everybody

that on Monday next—third of December—the house-breakers begin to demolish the Store and then, when people ask why, you can explain it as we've planned. If anything comes of it, there won't be much delay. Let it be known in your bar. Tell Saul Baggs and the bar-maid. Get it about."

Dick was swift to hope for good results and promised to do his part.

"And from the moment that story's let free, we must set our watch," said Mr. Bowden.

Forbes returned later to the Storehouse after his midday meal and suffered a strange suspicion that forces unknown were steadily opposing him. His complete failure surprised the man; and yet it affirmed him in a belief that within the ruin and not outside it lay the secret of his friend's disappearance. He had, however, ceased to feel confident that any living men still harboured there. He missed Prescott and realised vividly, now that he was gone, how much the other had been to him. No light showed. He lacked his colleague's own peculiar gifts; he regretted that he had not questioned him more closely on the case when they had met. He considered what he must do if the coming experiment failed; and he also began to plan for the necessary very close and sleepless watch which must follow the false report to be blazed abroad next day.

Bowden had already promised to prepare for that and Richard had undertaken not to start the canard until the following morning, when all pre-

cautions would have been taken. The project, however, did not promise much from the point of view of Forbes. For some reason that he could hardly explain, it seemed to him that the fact of Richard's initiation, necessary though it was, went far to lessen any hope of success. He could not analyse this curious conviction, yet it existed despite the massive evidence that Dick Rivers was honourable and trustworthy.

None else would be let into the secret, and those appointed to watch for the next few days and nights must all be ignorant that they were taking part in a hoax. That any persons—if such there were—still concealed in the ruin would hear what was to happen he did not doubt, but it had become very unlikely that the malefactors remained there, and at the bottom of his heart Martin Forbes believed the great ramshackle place now held a dead man—no living one.

Yet within four-and-twenty hours of that conviction, he enjoyed a private adventure which woke into keen life his dying interest and confirmed rather than allayed his fears for his friend. Moreover, the incident pointed, surely enough, to a living, hidden enemy close at hand.

Indeed, from this extraordinary event, there developed with bewildering swiftness the supreme criminal experience of Martin's career. He cited it afterwards as the culminating adventure of his life; nor did the future ever bring anything to equal it. For it found him in contact with something entirely outside his knowledge of human

nature; it revealed an opponent for whom the annals of crime could hardly show a parallel.

The false news was out next day and circulating through a hundred channels. Already the Storehouse stood under close observation, and the cordon would be drawn closer when night fell. And then, sitting in the heart of the ruin, Forbes entered upon his remarkable adventure. Dusk already drew in and the usual silence surrounded him, broken only by the murmur of the waves and the occasional shout of a child on the sands beneath. It was half-past four on a dark and clouded evening with mist drifting low over sand and sea. The detective had been much in thought with Raleigh Prescott through this day. In the morning he had travelled to Bridegate and seen his wife and his little girls. All was well with them, and at his office some lucrative work awaited him, but his heart was low and life had lost its salt. He believed now that his friend was dead. It seemed almost as though a voice had uttered the fact aloud, and the certainty of it settled like a great weight upon his heart. Prescott had fallen doing his duty and he, Martin Forbes, esteemed a shrewd, invincible man in the business he had made his own, sat here irresolute, baffled, burning with desire to avenge his companion, apparently impotent so to do. If ever a case might have been expected to bring its inspiration with it, if ever he was to be faced with a problem into which he must pour his strange genius and win a solution, the disappearance of his colleague should

have furnished it. Yet here he sat inert, not knowing which way to turn, his scheming exhausted, his efforts vain. He had worked upon the case as never had he worked before. He had used every trick of his trade and followed a thousand threads unknown to any man but himself. Others also had been working for him—men who knew Prescottt and himself and in many cases stood in his debt. But not one ray had penetrated the stubborn gloom. He could forge no connecting links of thought between the varied incidents of the past, and yet he doubted not that links there were; that, given the pass-word, this threefold mystery might be made to yield a connected narrative. He retraced the incidents in bare outline as he had done a thousand times. While the dusk thickened and his hour for leaving the Storehouse approached, he rehearsed the events which had brought him here and, as it seemed, anchored him above deep waters wherein he fished for nothing.

Michael Bellhanger had engaged to meet George Rivers in private, to complete a bargain. Soon after the time appointed, George Rivers had taken the train for Yeovil, being apparently led to do so by a forged letter stating that his sister was very ill. After he left Knighton, no man who knew him had ever reported the sight of him again, though there could be little doubt of the character of the search. Upon his departure, Michael Bellhanger had been found shot through the head at the appointed meeting-place. The innkeeper was, therefore, a potential murderer and he had been sought with all possible care and diligence. No

photograph of him existed, but his disfigurement made him not difficult to recognise in one way, though in another it increased his chances of escaping detection, because a "port wine" mark might be obliterated with grease paint and his white whiskers shaven off. Forbes doubted not that, if Rivers were the guilty man, these were the precautions he had taken. But he had ceased to believe him a guilty man. He inclined to the opinion that he had been lured away from home for reasons as yet undiscovered, and he believed that he might still be alive. The revolver revealed at "The Blue Peter" was "planted" there, in the opinion of Forbes, to incriminate George Rivers: a foolish act, because the last thing Rivers would have done, had he been guilty, was to place it where it had been found.

As for Michael Bellhanger, no reason apparently existed for his murder. Nothing had been discovered that indicated a secret enemy for him.

Then had come to West Haven a man of extraordinary skill and resource, to investigate this mystery with special reference to the dead. That Raleigh Prescott had left nothing to chance and taken every human precaution, Forbes well knew. No more rational man existed. He had no sense of fear when danger was demanded, but he never courted danger. "To seek danger, if you can get to your goal safely without it, is to lessen your chances of success"—so Prescott had often said.

And what had he done in this case? He had secretly opened the old tunnel, which all believed

to be closed, and he had thus planned for himself a private entrance and exit to and from the Storehouse. He had been amazingly careful to do this thing without telling a soul. Not even Bowden and the local police knew of it. Besides the masons—Bridegate men, who did their work by night and then went home sworn to keep silent—only two people had heard of his intention. They were the wife and daughter of the dead man. Had they revealed the secret?

Something suddenly broke the detective's train of thought. The past vanished as swiftly as a flash of lightning, and he was brought back to the present. Instinctively he shot his hand for a revolver in his side pocket, then he sat motionless, alert with ears pricked. For his hearing and no other sense had been challenged.

He heard a curious grating sound, with something human about it, yet unusual. It suggested the cough of a big ape. Thrice the noise was repeated, but nobody appeared. The light had failed; the place was empty. Yet some living thing lurked near, and Forbes knew that he had heard this strange sound before. In a moment he remembered that the passage way from Monks ran behind his wall. It was for that reason he had chosen this chamber. And then he recollected the sound, also. It came from the mouth of dumb Joe Baggs, the fisherman. It was the only vocal noise that he ever made, and it signified that he was clearing his throat.

A strange horror that had risen in the mind of Forbes at this sudden challenge out of emptiness

vanished as the situation came home to him. Baggs was in the tunnel. He started up, prepared to ascend the ladder, now planted in the chimney, and enter it himself; but again the metallic, raucous note came through the wall and he stood still. Baggs was waiting there. For what? He crept nearer and listened. There was silence during several minutes and then he heard a voice—a slow, dragging, deep voice that he had never heard before.

“Good, Joe—you got in? It’s Black Rocks—one o’clock—Sunday morning. Leave boat and come back for it at two.”

Joe Baggs uttered his bark again.

“Must get him away—must get him away, Joe. They start Monday,” said the voice. “Black Rocks—one—Sunday morning.”

With his head pressed to the wall, Forbes listened for more. But though his ears prompted him to the belief that feet now moved away behind the wall, he could not be sure of that.

No further word reached him, though a fading mutter died away as the unseen departed.

His first impulse was to enter the tunnel instantly from the chimney close at hand, but wisdom denied this futile and dangerous expedient. His thoughts leapt and wrestled together. For a moment he felt triumphant, the next, doubtful. Was this genuine, or a trap deliberately set for him? Was he on the brink of success, or in danger of a reverse, that had been planned to send him after his companion, for reasons he could never know?

For five more minutes he stood still with his ear pressed to the wall. Then he returned to a chair and sat revolving the situation until it was quite dark. Finally he rose and departed, his mind resolved. He emerged, to find several of the fishermen in the great chamber on the ground floor under the sail-loft. They were permitted from time to time to visit their stores and gear under control of a watcher. They carried lanterns and soon went their way. But behind the rest, together, came Ernest Norman and Joe Baggs. They carried a few lobster-pots and Forbes spoke to them.

"You chaps will soon have better quarters built for you, I reckon. They'll have to run you up new quarters—eh?"

Joe made his familiar croak and Norman answered.

"They tell it's going to be done, master, when this place be pulled down."

"Maybe it will. Money's no object. I believe the chap's going to do you all right," declared Forbes.

They went away together and the detective considered. Baggs must clearly know another outlet from the tunnel, for he could not have used the chimney exit and the ladder beneath it. It was still only twenty-five minutes since Forbes had heard him and his companion behind the wall. He had doubtless entered with the other fishermen and slipped away from their marine stores in the basement under cover of darkness. Was Norman his companion? Norman had a slow, deep voice,

but why should Norman, who could visit Baggs in the security of his own home, or go to sea with him at any time, choose this fashion of communicating? Why—unless he had done it on purpose that Forbes himself might listen to his communication? Against that, the fact that one could hear voices in the tunnel from the room where the detective had taken up his quarters, was not known to the fishermen. After his original discovery, Forbes had been at pains to impress upon the police the importance of telling nobody that the secret tunnel ran that way. No; Joe Baggs had seen and listened to somebody who could meet him nowhere else—the hidden one who knew the truth. Immensely important conclusions arose from this incident. First, no trap had been set for Forbes, because there was nobody who could set it. Secondly, the illusion created, that the Storehouse was to be destroyed, had done its work and the rat was to be bolted; thirdly, the detective had established collusion between unknown people and one from the outside world. But the latter, being known, might henceforth be watched. The time was short and much had to be done.

He proceeded to the police station now and, according to his custom, weighed every incident of this experience while detail remained fresh in memory. Thus he committed each aspect of the new material to his mind irrevocably without confusion or doubt. First there was the voice and then the words that it had spoken. The voice was strange, but it did not follow that the speaker must be unknown to him. The voice might have

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been assumed. The words, however, were of greater importance than the voice. Only in the event of a trap; only on the assumption that the speaker knew he was being overheard, and had spoken accordingly, would any need to disguise his voice exist. But Forbes had already convinced himself that the speaker could not know he was being overheard. He had planned to meet his accomplice at this place in ignorance of its weakness and relative position to the chamber in the other side of the wall. What, then, had he said? "Black Rocks—one o'clock—Sunday morning. Leave boat and come back at two. Must get him away—must get him away, Joe."

Who must be got away? The detective could not be sure, but he could guess. The destruction of the Storehouse would lay all bare and there was hidden somebody, alive or dead, who could no longer be trusted in the ruin.

The detective was soon closeted with Samuel Bowden, before whom he laid his experience. He then heard the inspector, for Forbes was not a man to attempt anything single-handed, when useful help might be secured to throw light on his own opinions, or strengthen his own hand. And Bowden, a capable officer enough, now made suggestions of value.

"Tell me first where are the Black Rocks," said Forbes, after he had related recent incidents.

"The Black Rocks are two parallel ridges that lie off the cliffs to the east—just where the cliffs begin," explained Samuel. "They are not black really, and there's a channel of deep water be-

tween the ridges, where the fishermen often come and go."

"How far from the Storehouse?"

"Not above a hundred and fifty yards from the south-east corner. You'd bear south-east over the sand and, at low tide, a boat under the rocks would lie just about a hundred and seventy yards from the Store."

The inspector consulted a chart.

"Low tide at half after one on Sunday morning," he added.

"We can call off the watch tomorrow, then, and let it be known they are off. Instead, we'll set a secret watch, unknown to all but the watchers. They'll be hidden from every sight and yet near enough to see if anybody goes in, or comes out, from any of the known exits and entrances. The two doors to mark chiefly are those on east and south, but all must, of course, be watched."

"That's right. And there's the tunnel end at Monks. That must either be watched or left barred up, as at present. The place is empty just now, but Mrs. Bellhanger comes home again on Sunday, I understand. And there's Baggs to be thought upon. How do you think to handle him?"

"Like this," explained Forbes. "He'll be taking his boat to the Black Rocks somewhere after midnight. Don't let him know anything's wrong. Wait till he comes out to his boat."

"He'll leave it down at low tide on Saturday," explained Bowden, "so as he won't have the trouble to push it down on Sunday morning."

"After dark two men must hide near his place and wait for him. They can arrest him when he leaves his cottage. Till then he must be free."

"That'll do for him. And for the other?"

"There may be more than one. We must take no risks. There will be somebody with them—that's the point. We can work out details when we get our guard. But not one of the guard must know what we know, Bowden. Let there be six of them. We can eliminate Monks, as that will be blocked from inside; but though the vital exits are those to east and south of the Storehouse, the others must also be guarded. And the Black Rocks."

"Needless. Nobody will get that far," replied the inspector.

"They must be watched, nevertheless," answered Forbes. "The boat will not be there, but there may be a way out of the Store—we don't know. We can't tell just where, or how, the unknown men will emerge, but we know where they're bound."

They parted presently, and while he was drinking his tea—a meal Forbes never missed if he could help it—that exquisite and orderly machine which was his mind retraced its way, and, as though unwilling to leave any train of thoughts broken, took its master back to the reflection interrupted by the incidents in the Store. Suddenly he was presented with the end of the mental process upon which he had been engaged when he had heard Joe Baggs rake his throat behind the wall. He gathered up the argument, recol-

lected upon what he had been reflecting and the exact point to which he had reached.

He was thinking of Raleigh Prescott and tracing his last known operations before he vanished. He had followed him to the opening of the tunnel; he had remembered that only four persons were aware of Prescott's intention, save himself, and that the doubtful twain were Mrs. Bellhanger and her daughter. His review had been broken at a question, and now duty demanded the answer to that question if an answer could be won.

The Bellhangers were to return to Monks on the following Sunday; but, as nothing required his immediate attention, Forbes determined to see them before the day was done. They were staying with relations not far from Bridegate, and he doubted not that Richard Rivers knew their direction.

He sought Dick, therefore, as soon as he had finished his tea and learned the necessary particulars.

Within an hour he had started for Glebe End—a little farm two miles beyond the town—and as he went he wondered why he had not raised this point before. Prescott had certainly urged silence, but women find it hard to keep interesting news from their friends. It was possible that Mrs. Bellhanger or her daughter had imparted the information innocently enough; it was even possible that they might recollect the fact. He hoped little and regarded his quest as routine work unlikely to pay for the trouble; but he did not know of the

probability of the women, or of the certitude that they would tell truth.

He found them at Glebe End with Mrs. Bellhanger's sister-in-law, Susan Whyte, and her husband; and the widow welcomed him, judging that the visit might mean some report of progress. Martin Forbes, however, raised no hopes. He indicated that his work was proceeding and declared it to be difficult and disappointing. He had come for information and begged that he might see Mary alone for five minutes.

They left the snug kitchen of Glebe End for a cold little parlour, and there he put his question.

"Think carefully," he said, "and don't imagine I shall be vexed if you've got to confess you let out the secret. It might prove a valuable clue, Mrs. Bellhanger. You knew the night that Raleigh Prescott was having the tunnel opened, and you knew that he had asked you to keep quiet about it; but you may have let it out—just to some close friend in confidence. Carry your mind back and try hard to think if you did. Don't keep it from me if by any chance you mentioned it—perhaps to your head man—or a woman, or somebody."

Mrs. Bellhanger, however, wasted no time in reflection. She replied at once, positively.

"I can swear to it if you like, Mr. Forbes. I was convinced that your partner attached great importance to getting to and from the Store unknown and unseen. Of course I could see that might be a very great advantage to him if people were hiding in it, as he firmly believed. Not a

whisper left my lips. I'm as positive of that as I am positive it was on the early morning of the twenty-third of November that Mr. Prescott went down the tunnel."

"I'm answered then," replied the other. "Now I'll put the same question to your daughter. Perhaps you'll ask her to step in; but don't please tell her what I want."

"She'll say the same as me, be sure," answered Mary and returned to the kitchen. But she was mistaken, for Phyllis, when the question reached her ear, made no instant reply. She was the soul of honesty and her memory did not play her false. She saw nothing calculated to involve another in the question. Indeed, for a moment she forgot the truth and was about to answer decisively that she had told no one. But then she remembered and blushed—not for fear, but for shame that she should have disregarded Prescott's direction.

"I was going to say I had told nobody about the opening of the tunnel," she answered. "But now I remember that I did tell one person. It slipped out. I wouldn't have mentioned it to another; but it came natural to do so to him; because it was life and death to him, same as it was to me, Mr. Forbes. You see our whole lives—his and mine—depend on whether Mr. George Rivers was innocent or not. So I thought it would put hope into him as well as it had into me, if he knew how Mr. Prescott was working."

"Who, Miss Bellhanger?"

"The man I'd been engaged to. I'd broke it off, or half broke it off because—because it seemed

only decent till all was known. And my mother, who always believed his father had done it, insisted I should. And I saw it was the proper thing. But we hoped then, as we do now, that time would clear his father. And I felt anyway that he would be glad to hear about it."

"Richard Rivers?"

"Yes."

"When did you tell him?"

"The very night. I was going to shop, and Dick met me, and we had a chat together."

"Thank you very much, Miss Bellhanger. Did you tell him as a secret and explain that he mustn't mention it?"

She considered.

"I'm pretty sure to have done that. Yes, I did—I know I did. But he'll remember. Ask him tonight."

He made no comment and left them five minutes later to debate his purpose together. Mary blamed her daughter and Phyllis admitted the fault, but held it of no significance. The detective, however, regretted what he had learned. The obtrusion of Richard Rivers he felt to be a nuisance at this juncture, yet it was far too important to be ignored. More than ever it became necessary in his opinion to conceal what he had heard that afternoon in the Storehouse. Neither Richard Rivers nor any friend of his must know about it.

To Bowden he went directly with this item of intelligence, and there a further source of disquiet awaited him. It seemed that certain persons would thrust themselves into the web of his weav-

ing despite his desire to keep them out. First it had been necessary to tell Richard of the pretended demolition of the Storehouse, and now he heard something new that he felt disposed to regret. This time Richard himself was not involved, but another, who happened to be very directly interested in his welfare.

Bowden was not interested in the fact that young Rivers had known of Prescott's exploration some hours before it happened. He attached no importance to that, since his mind concerning Richard had long been made up. He could not, however, deny that Forbes was justified in concealing his future plans from Richard.

"If I'd known two hours ago, I'd have gone further," he said, "and not told his uncle either. But it's too late to keep him out. You see my job was to fix up the party of watchers for Sunday morning, and I've seen Pat Rivers and the rest. None know who the others are till the time comes. That's safest. They must be armed, too."

"I'm sorry you told him. That means another journey for me tonight. He's amenable and must be directed not to mention the matter to Richard Rivers. Where is he now?"

"Home for certain," said Bowden. "I know he didn't go to the inn, for I did, when I left him."

"You didn't name it to his nephew?"

"I did not. It's like this, Forbes. I'm not sure if I told you. Patrick Rivers and myself are very old friends and, naturally, he's deeply interested in this affair. He never will believe that George Rivers shot Bellhanger. And it was he invented

this plant about making West Haven believe the Storehouse was to be pulled down. I meant to give him the credit, and now it's come off and we're in sight of our reward, he must have the credit. I say these things to explain why I confided your own adventure in the Storehouse to him."

Forbes nodded.

"I wasn't going to tell anybody except the watchers, and I thought they'd all be your police. However, if he knows, he knows; and the next thing is to tell him to keep shut about it."

"You can trust him for that. He realizes the importance of secrecy."

"Can I trust him not to tell his nephew? He might innocently, or he might—for other reasons. Anyway, I'll see him now."

In ten minutes Forbes was with the veterinary surgeon, who had just sat down to his supper. Patrick was much excited and displayed a rare animation.

"I'm good for something it seems," he said. "Sam has told me all about it, Forbes."

"Not all," answered the other. "I congratulate you, for I've only just heard that it was you, and not Bowden, who hit on this idea—to bolt the vermin hid yonder. And it's come off. But I want your word that you'll not tell a soul—not a soul—not even your nephew till after Sunday morning. I regard that as in the last degree important, Mr. Rivers. Everything may turn on it."

The other pushed away his plate and swallowed the food in his mouth.

“You don’t mean Dick? You’re not harping on Dick?” he asked. “But you are,” he answered himself. “That beats me! Haven’t you found out yet what my nephew is?”

“I haven’t,” answered Forbes bluntly. “I’ve found out nothing at all. Nobody’s cleared yet—not a soul; but some are implicated. You’ve heard what I heard. You’d have been surprised yesterday to learn that dumb Joe Baggs knew anything about this job. But so it is. Frankly, I’m not satisfied about your nephew and I shouldn’t have asked you myself to help me on Sunday morning.”

Mr. Rivers was moved and hurt.

“Then I won’t,” he said. “If you’re meaning that Dick and I are not to be trusted and not on the side of justice in this terrible affair, then for God’s sake say so, and we can clear out of West Haven till you let us come back.”

A most unwonted excitement marked the injured man and Forbes strove to calm him.

“Don’t think anything like that, Mr. Rivers,” he said. “Try and look at this infernal business from another point than your own for a minute. One has to take everything into account and not let the least side issue slip before one explores it. I haven’t got anything against Richard Rivers; but he’s close to this affair and has been from the first. That was natural, because his own father is most deeply involved. Well, there are two things that I’ve got to consider and must weigh very carefully. Your nephew crops up curiously—meets me in all sorts of unexpected places, so to

say. Only today I found out for the first time that Richard knew the tunnel was going to be opened on the very night it was opened."

"He couldn't have known it," replied the other, whose indignation had waned. "I'm not presuming to say that you haven't a perfect right to satisfy yourself about everybody here. Of course you have, and it's our duty to do exactly as you direct us—or it should be. But in that particular matter Richard couldn't have known, because nobody in West Haven did know—not even Bowden. Only Mrs. and Miss Bellhanger knew."

"That's true; but it happens that Miss Bellhanger told Richard a few hours before Raleigh Prescott went down the tunnel."

Patrick stared.

"There now!" he said. "That shows how little right one man has got to criticise another."

"You must always remember when a bit of information passes, it's impossible to say where it will stop. I'm not asserting that Richard Rivers had an evil thought in his head. I'm only saying that he knew a very vital fact. How can we be sure he didn't hand it on to a dozen men in the bar of 'The Blue Peter' an hour after he'd heard it? For the minute I only want you to understand why I do not wish your nephew, or anybody else, to know what I'm doing, or why I'm doing it, on Sunday morning next. Naturally your nephew means a lot to you, and for that reason I shouldn't have told you these things till afterwards, or asked you to help; but Bowden has done so—quite naturally since the scheme was yours—

and you're going to be one of the watchers. For your own sake, Mr. Rivers, I shouldn't have asked you to be one of them for this reason. If it was found that your nephew knew more than he ought to know, if I discovered that he was in league with some secret forces hid in the Store, then it would be very painful for you. But now you know, you've got to go through with it and do your duty, whatever shape that duty may take. It's in a nutshell. Somebody is going from the Store to a boat at Black Rocks after one o'clock on Sunday morning. Somebody's going, and somebody else is going with him, or them. The hour is fixed and our work should be easy enough, if we have all the exits from the ruin."

"Yes; if we have. But have we?" asked the other. "The Storehouse is to be watched and every exit guarded; but be sure those hidden there know all about that. Why should they think it isn't going to be watched on Saturday night and Sunday morning? When this unknown devil was heard by you talking to Baggs, he spoke of the Black Rocks, and I'll wager he had in his mind some unknown way out of the Store, out of your sight and out of sight of anybody else watching it. Else he wouldn't have planned any such thing."

"It's possible. But I've let it be known the guard is withdrawn now, so he may be calculating that Saturday night——"

"Never!" answered Patrick. "Is such a man as this must be going to take chances? We all know the guard's withdrawn; but won't he, or they, guess that there's still a secret guard looking

sharp after the Store? Are you the sort to give them one clear night to do as they please before the house-breakers begin? Why, it's after they begin that you'll be most careful to have your guard ready. It's when they start cutting a corn-field that the rabbits bolt, not before. Of course you'll watch it day and night. But you can't watch what you don't know. So I say that you're wrong to arrest Baggs till afterwards. The point to concentrate on is his boat at Black Rocks. That's where they must come at the end, whichever way they go."

"You have never heard of an outlet anywhere near the Black Rocks?"

"Never; yet those hidden in the Store may know of such an outlet. If they don't, they're taking a risk you can hardly think they would take."

"That's the point. They're taking it, because it's got to be taken. On a dark night with sand under your feet, you're pretty hard to find, remember."

He stopped and then proceeded.

"I wouldn't say you're not right about Joe Baggs and the boat all the same. The point I want to reach is where we can post ourselves to the best purpose, so that if something happens after one o'clock on Sunday morning, we are placed to take most advantage of it. Of course we shall watch at the Black Rocks as well as the Storehouse."

They talked for some time and Patrick forgot his nephew before the interest of the problem.

At last Martin Forbes made a suggestion. He regretted the necessity for this conversation, but did not regret the result, for here was a man with every family inducement to clear his relations of suspicion and one not without intelligent perception of the difficulties.

"We'll go to Bowden," said the detective. "He'd better hear what we're talking about, for I've got a bit further with this since I saw you than I had when I left him. The ruin's a warren and the problem is to leave no hole unguarded."

"Right, but my feeling is there are holes you don't know," replied the other.

CHAPTER X

MARTIN FORBES rarely disguised himself, but occasionally the necessity arose and then he could do so effectively enough. He was now too well known in West Haven to conduct any very lengthy examination of the cliffs and the Black Rocks in his own person; nor was it possible to make the needful changes at "The Blue Peter." Neither Richard Rivers nor Saul Baggs, the brother of Joe, must learn his purpose; therefore Forbes left the inn early on the following morning and repaired to the police station, where Bowden already awaited him. Half an hour later, in response to a telephone message, his wife arrived from Bridegate with a bag containing the needful garments; and presently, as a brown-faced, close-bearded, long-shore loafer, the detective went his way pipe in mouth.

It was still early and beneath the cliffs only a grey herring gull or two ran at the water's edge, while above him the jackdaws chattered and welcomed the winter sun. The morning was cloudless and the light turned the yellow faces of the cliffs to orange and threw a searching beam upon their yellow sandstone faces. Here and there upon the beach were masses of rock that had fallen in the past from the over-hang of the precipices, but the cliff planes were for the most part smooth.

No cave or cranny broke them, and having walked a mile along the empty beach and scrutinized the surface of the precipices very carefully, Forbes was convinced that they could conceal nothing. Here and there extended a broken ledge, and here and there he marked holes large enough for a jackdaw to nest in; but not the least evidence, above or below, revealed any possible channel or opening. Neither did the occasional blocks of stone upon the shore indicate any way. Their bases were buried in the beach gravels and their weathered, rugged faces rose intact before him. The Black Rocks themselves, now partially visible, sloped in two broken, parallel lines to the sea. They formed a little natural inlet and safe harbour for small boats, and already an early fisherman, back from his lobster-pots, pulled in between them. He landed, anchored his boat and then walked along the flat-faced rocks to the shore and proceeded homeward over the sand, his catch in a basket.

Before ten o'clock, having proved the impossibility of a secret passage from the Storehouse to the Black Rocks, Martin Forbes returned to Mr. Bowden and soon resumed his own garments.

He was puzzled, for he had recognized, as Patrick Rivers had pointed out, that unless some unknown exit existed, it was hard to believe any persons could escape from the Store unseen. He proceeded, however, with his plans, on the assumption the voice in the wall had indicated the course to be pursued, and that Joe Baggs knew what was going to be done. It occurred to him that

there might exist an opening between Joe's own cottage and the Store; but this was no time to prove the fact.

"All we know for certain is that Baggs has been directed to have his boat at the Black Rocks after one o'clock on Sunday morning," summed up Forbes. "On the face of it you'd hardly look for any attempt to leave the Storehouse, for the reason that those in it won't believe the rumour that the guard is removed tomorrow. But they may. Anyway, we have to watch the four known exits of the Store and also the boat landing. There's a broken mass from the cliff twenty yards out, where two or three men can hide after dark and drop on anybody going down to the Black Rocks; And for the rest I'll have one armed observer hid close to each exit and be free myself to go and come between them."

"There's a waning moon," said Bowden, "and we shall have a pinch of light even if it's cloudy."

The day proved a busy one, for the inquest was renewed at eleven o'clock. But the proceedings did not occupy above an hour. The police had nothing new to report and Dr. Bull, the coroner, soon listened to the familiar verdict and closed the proceedings. Michael Bellhanger had been murdered by a person or persons unknown.

The secret plans for Sunday morning were laid, and Forbes found that not less than nine men would be necessary. With the exception of Patrick Rivers and one other friend of Bowden, all belonged to the police save the detective himself. The present watchers were all dismissed at mid-

day Saturday, and at dusk in the evening the others secretly took their places. But they were concealed and none could have guessed that five men watched the Storehouse at close quarters, that two waited to arrest Joe Baggs when he should start for his boat, and that two would presently take up a position beside the only way to the Black Rocks. Upon the south, sea-facing side of the Storehouse, Bowden and Forbes himself were hidden behind an old boat—a familiar object that had long lain there. Eastward, fifteen yards from the ruin, ran a broken wall along a miniature rifle range, and behind this Constable Walpole took his station opposite the sole exit on that side. After dark he would emerge and be able to get still nearer, where stood a broken tar-barrel. To the north ran the high road, and though this was the most unlikely exit, an armed man concealed himself in the garden of a cottage there within six yards of the northern door. This, the largest exit, opened into a big storeroom, sometimes used as a motor garage by “The Blue Peter.” To the west spread the fore-court with its entrance for the sand carts on to the road. Here ascended the stone steps to the sail-loft and there was no other way of going into the Storehouse on this side save up the steps. Patrick Rivers guarded this approach. He entered unobserved at dusk, and concealed himself near the bottom of the steps behind an empty cart. Service revolvers had been served to every man, and the watchers were directed to challenge anybody who might appear and fire upon him instantly if he did not hold up

his hands and surrender. All stood within ear-shot of each other and a shout would bring Forbes, while leaving the rest at their posts. From these no man was to budge under any circumstances.

The night came still and cloudy, but when the moon presently rose, it spread a measure of diffused light through the darkness. The hours crept by and West Haven slept. The last shout from Saturday night revellers was still; the hunting cats, that prowled on the cliffs for rabbits, had crept back to the fishermen's cottages. But there was life between the pier heads and in the silence a voice or two reached the watchers from that point, half a mile distant. A vessel had just made harbour, but would have to wait off the pier until the tide rose to reach the wharves within, for it was now at low ebb. The time had come to arrest Joe Baggs, who must now be descending to his boat. Forbes strained his ears towards the cottages on his left hand; but all remained silent there. The moon broke through and flickered on the broken sea-facing windows above him; a breath came up out of the sea laden with odour of sea-weed. It sighed over the sand and brushed a naked tamarisk that grew under the wall of the Storehouse. At one o'clock Forbes visited all the watchers and returned to Bowden.

Time passed and then, suddenly the inspector gripped his companion's arm and pointed high over their heads. Something at last was to happen. A shattered window opened in the face of the Store; but it was not in this naked aperture that anything moved. Higher yet, in the angle

of the gable, gaped an old rent large enough to admit a man. It gave into a hole immediately under the roof, and it had been explored more than once by ladder from outside, since there existed no known means to ascend to it from within. Now, however, both Forbes and Bowden distinctly saw a face and shoulders emerge from this hole and look out on to the beach. But the face was black. It moved upon its neck, then stretched out of the Store and peered down to right and left. Dim moonlight sufficed to reveal it, and when it had withdrawn, the detective whispered to his companion.

"Did he see us? I never thought about that place; but it's so high that anybody up there would get almost a bird's-eye view of this boat and spot us behind it."

Bowden kept his eye fixed on the black hole aloft. Both men crouched low under the body of the boat.

"I don't think we were seen," he answered. "The moonlight was in his eyes. He'd only note a black patch on the beach I reckon and see no more than the boat." He proved correct apparently, for now the black face appeared again and then it disappeared once more and something else protruded. A long, narrow object thrust out from beneath the gable and presently it hung outside suspended by a rope. The rope glistened white in the moonlight, but the oblong parcel was black. Its shape was sinister, and obvious as it swung. By instinct both the watchers knew what was now sinking swiftly down to the sand beneath the

Storehouse wall as the man above paid out the rope.

"A stiff!" murmured Bowden; and to him the descending parcel signified no more than a corpse; but to Forbes it meant much more, for now he knew that his friend and faithful companion had met an evil fate and was upon the way to a last resting-place intended to hide his bones for ever. His instinct was to leap forward and fire into the dark smudge above, but he held passion well in hand. The gallows would soon pay the black monster over his head. He anticipated the unknown's next action and when the dark parcel had descended to earth and the rope was thrown down after it, Forbes looked upwards cautiously, waited for ten seconds and then spoke to Bowden.

"Get nearer," he said. "He's gone. He'll come down and be out through the door in a moment. Stand against the wall on each side of him; then we'll nab him and shout for the rest."

They left the boat and were soon standing on either side of the door; while between them lay the long, black parcel, shining fitfully, and the rope thrown down beside it. A minute passed, but no footfall sounded. All was silent.

"He saw us," murmured Bowden.

"Had he seen us, he would not have lowered—that."

"I'm afraid he saw us when it was too late. It was easy to lower it down; but impossible for one man to pull it up again. He let it go with a run. It surely means there's only one there."

"I'll warn the rest. Stop here and put a bullet

into anybody who comes out unless they yield," directed Forbes.

Then he slipped round the south-east angle of the Store, and visited first the policeman concealed behind the tar-barrel, the private friend of Bowden, hid to the north behind the cottage wall, and the fore-court guarded by Rivers. None had anything to report. Forbes acted quickly and directed every watcher to keep his place while he hastened to seek the constables deputed to arrest Joe Baggs. Then he found immediately, for they were lurking out of sight at the west end of the cottages, that they might not appear and disturb the operations at the Storehouse.

They had waited until one o'clock for the fisherman, then broken into his house and found him in bed. His old sister was roused and she interpreted for him. Joe had declared himself as absolutely ignorant of everything. His boat was among the other boats high upon the beach, and he explained that, single-handed, he had not the strength to have got her down to the sea. He swore that he could tell them nothing, had never been in the secret passage of the Storehouse, and had received no secret summons to attend at the Black Rocks after one o'clock that night.

Forbes, with his ears cocked for any alarm from within, strove vainly to understand this development. Baggs at least must be harmless now and could be questioned later. He left the two policemen to join Bowden at the southern front of the ruin; then he hastened to the watchers at the Black Rocks. No boat lay at the natural harbour

and the weed-covered masses of stone stretched in two dark fingers down to the sea. All was silent and the men hidden in the shadow of the great boulder had neither heard nor seen anything.

Leaving one, Forbes brought the other back with him. There remained a single known exit to establish and presently Inspector Bowden proposed to visit Monks, that he might be sure the entrance to the tunnel was still barred and the timbers used to block it untouched. He held the key of the farm until the following day, and since Forbes directed him to take a companion, he now relieved Patrick Rivers of his watch, left a policeman in the fore-court, to guard the sail-loft steps, and then started with the veterinary surgeon beside him.

"It's a matter of form," he said, "but we're leaving nothing to chance. We'll run up and see all's right, and then you can go home. You've done your bit. I suppose Richard is in bed all snug?"

"Where should he be?" asked Rivers. "I promised Forbes to keep the night's work from everybody at 'The Blue Peter,' and I kept my word. We know Dick, and Forbes ought to know him by now—a public character in the sporting world like Richard. But, for reasons hid from me, he's got a down on him."

"He won't have after tonight. This lets in a terrible light, and tomorrow we ought to have the man landed."

"A man!" exclaimed the other. "Have you seen a man? Forbes only said something was

doing: he didn't tell me what. He was off again in a minute."

"We've seen a live man and got a dead one," declared Bowden. Then he narrated his recent strange experience.

"Pretty awful—to see a corpse come trundling down at the end of a rope, and Forbes trembled with rage and itched to let fly. But, please God, it will mean a rope for the murderer before long. I was terribly sorry for Martin. To watch the body of your best friend chucked down on the sand like a dead pig——"

But at this moment they saw the figure of a man descending the hill from Monks. It was Bowden who marked him and instantly drew his companion into the shadow of the hedge.

"Quiet! Who's that?" he whispered.

The waning moon had emerged from the clouds and both quickly recognized Dick Rivers. His size alone satisfied them that it was he.

Patrick started in astonishment, but Bowden acted.

"What the devil is he doing up here? Stop hidden, Pat. Don't let him see you. I'll walk along and talk to him, and when we've gone, get up to Monks—here's the key—and see the tunnel's all right. When I've seen him home, I'll come up. Wait till I come."

In a moment the inspector had emerged from the dark and turned his face back to West Haven. He walked slowly and then Richard passed the concealed man, ignorant of his presence, and overtook Bowden. Rivers heard them greet each other

and walk down the hill together. Then he ascended to Monks, opened the locked door and entered the house. All was still and silent, and with a world of wonder on his forehead, Patrick fumbled about in the kitchen until he found a lamp, then lighted it and descended to the cellar. Meantime Bowden had exclaimed at the sight of Richard.

"You!" he said. "What the mischief are you up to, Dick, at this time of night? It's two o'clock, or near it."

The young man laughed.

"I daresay you are astonished, Samuel. But you were in love once?"

"If not oftener," admitted the inspector. "But what's that got to do with you?"

"It's this way. Phyllis is coming home tomorrow with Mrs. Bellhanger. They leave Glebe End after dinner and Mr. Whyte drives them back. And I was awake in bed thinking and thinking. Then I got up and wrote my girl a long letter—for she is my girl yet, and will be my wife some day, please God, when we know the truth. I wrote and wrote, and then I came up here and put the letter in the letter-box for her to find tomorrow."

"I wish you'd chose another night, Dick, for there's a good deal happening I may tell you. You'll hear tomorrow something to make your blood curdle. But not a word tonight. You get in and go to bed."

They were at the door of the hotel and Richard, excited that there was news, asked Bowden to join him in a drink. Samuel, however, declined.

"My work's not done and won't be yet awhile.

And you'd better keep shut about this, Richard. I shan't let on I've seen you for the minute, and don't you say you was poking about out-of-doors tonight, when you hear what you will hear tomorrow."

With this warning he saw the young man into his home and five minutes later hastened back again to Monks. There was a light in the window and the front door stood open.

Inspector Bowden, desiring to return to Forbes as soon as possible, entered quickly and found his friend sitting in the kitchen.

"I thought you'd never come," said Mr. Rivers, picking up the lamp. "The tunnel's open, Sam!"

Rivers was clearly very anxious and his voice shook. He led the way below and the other followed.

"Open!"

"Two of the timbers are pulled down—there's room for a man to get through."

A moment later Bowden stared at the dismantled barrier. Two beams had been unhitched and a hole yawned into the darkness behind them.

The inspector spoke.

"Your nephew admitted that he had just come from Monks," he said. "I asked him what he was out for at this hour, and he told me he'd suddenly got in mind to write a letter to his sweetheart and leave it for her to find tomorrow."

"It may be true, Sam. We can see if there is a letter there."

"Was the door locked?"

"Certainly it was."

"This looks mighty bad, Pat. Help me put these beams in place again. They couldn't have been shifted from the tunnel side—you see that?"

Mr. Rivers admitted it.

"No—they must have been moved from the cellar."

They worked together for five minutes and dropped the two beams into slots fitted to receive them. The opening was now sealed beyond any power of man to break through from the tunnel.

"It's shutting the stable door after the horse is stolen I reckon," murmured Samuel.

They ascended and Bowden proceeded to the front door. A letter lay in the box directed to Phyllis Bellhanger.

"Thank God—that lets him out!" said Richard's uncle; but the other was by no means satisfied.

"I'll look round," he answered, "and I'll ask you to stop here, Pat. This is my job and every detail of this business must be clear."

"The door was locked," his friend reminded him. "And the letter was where he said it was, and it's his writing."

"That's all right. I'll ask you to stop just here, please, till I come back. I must do my duty."

The inspector turned on his torch and Mr. Rivers obeyed without replying. He stood staring before him motionless and distracted, while Bowden proceeded to search the house. Patrick heard him tramping over-head; then, having entered every room, he descended to the kitchen again and presently proceeded to the parlour and two other

apartments on the ground floor. Presently he came back.

"Look here, Pat," he said and beckoned.

In the scullery a window stood wide open.

"We're too late," was all that Bowden said.

He stared about and with his torch sought for footmarks within and without the window; but he could see nothing.

"We'll go down now," he said, and as they left Monks his friend asked a question.

"What does it mean, Sam?"

"It means a lot," answered the other. "It means your nephew I'm fearing, Pat."

"Never! He told you the truth. You know him as well as I do."

"I thought I did; but this will take a lot of understanding. You ask what it means. First it means that somebody knew what was up tonight. Somebody was in touch with that unknown black-faced man and came here to help him escape if need be. Somebody has been watching us tonight but couldn't get to him to tell him his game was up. That's how I read it. Then that somebody, knowing his only chance was Monks, and knowing the tunnel was blocked up and wouldn't be watched, nipped up here and opened it. Then, when the black man spotted me and Forbes, as I guessed he did at the time, he saw his chance of escape was here and only here. And he's taken it."

"You go too far. Forbes may have had something up his sleeve and opened the tunnel himself today without telling us."

But Bowden shook his head.

"That won't do. I was up here myself in the afternoon to make all sure. Forbes never thought of anyone working from outside. Somebody's done us, Rivers."

"I'll go bail for Richard."

"As for him, I'm the law now—not your friend, Pat—and you must listen to me. Richard doesn't guess that I've found this out. I'm speaking as if he'd done it and hoping to God he didn't; because if he did it, that means—worse—far worse than I want to think about. But for the moment it's up to him, and he won't guess this job will come out till daylight. I'll ask you to swear to me before God that you'll not see Richard again till you've seen me. I've a right to command you to keep away from your nephew, Pat, and if you refuse, then I shall arrest him this minute. If you'll swear not to go nigh him, then I'll leave it for the present. As it stands, Dick Rivers doesn't know that you and I have been to Monks, and he won't guess anybody troubles about the farm till tomorrow. The interest will be nearer home with this poor dead chap. But God help anybody who tries to come between Forbes and the man that's murdered his pal."

Patrick Rivers was broken.

"This night's been too much for me," he said. "I wish you'd never brought me into it, Samuel."

"You swear not to go near Richard; and be quick about it, Pat."

"I swear I won't then."

"That's all right. Get home and go to bed."

Your word's your bond and always was. We're too old for this sort of caper. I feel the bronchitis rising in my throat already. But don't give up hope. We may find Dick's straight. We know nothing yet."

Bowden turned for the beach and the other dragged himself away. He looked with haggard eyes at "The Blue Peter," but his friend saw him walk past and move slowly towards the docks on his road home. Then Samuel hastened down to the shore to find that Forbes was already gone to the police station. A trolley had been drawn from the fore-court and the parcel, which proved to be wrapped in a tarpaulin and tightly roped, was already removed. Watchers still guarded every exit of the Storehouse, but no sight or sound from within had rewarded them.

They would be relieved at dawn, and with daylight a fresh search must begin. Forbes had left a message for Bowden to follow him. The detective himself and one other man had dragged the long bundle away.

At the police station Samuel, now almost too exhausted to stand, found Martin Forbes waiting for the arrival of Dr. Colfax.

"I can't look into this myself," he said. "It's asking too much. He's in the mortuary, and when the doctor comes, you and another had better lend him a hand. I'll stop here and see my poor old pal tomorrow."

Bowden fetched a private bottle from his desk and poured himself out the stiffest dose of whiskey that he had ever consumed. He prepared to

tell his story, but at this moment the motor of the doctor drew up and the inspector postponed his narrative.

"Pour some of that down your neck," he said. "We can prove the death in ten minutes and that's all there is for it tonight. The bird's flown. You may call them off."

He was gone before Forbes answered. Indeed the detective hardly heard him. His own vitality ran low and the consciousness that he had lost his friend for ever rendered him for a time inert and indifferent. Until now a ray of hope had sustained him. But he hoped no longer. He had blundered badly. There was a serious error in his calculations and he dimly guessed where it would be found; but his brain was weary and he knew himself incapable of any mental effort until sleep had restored him.

Forbes drank and tramped the office. Twice he started to join the party in the mortuary and twice he relinquished the project. Tomorrow would be soon enough to learn what the dead could tell him.

And on the mortuary slab under brilliant electric light, Walpole, Bowden and Dr. Colfax disrobed the mummy-like object that the Storehouse had disgorged. They cut the ropes, drew off a heavy tarpaulin coat, revealed a cere-cloth of old canvas and then gazed upon a dead man. But it was not Raleigh Prescott who seemed to stare upon them. The corpse of George Rivers lay there.

CHAPTER XI

THE thousand new issues challenged by this unexpected incident bewildered even those best able to weigh them. For time had established a certain order in disorder and indicated that, at least, some stable points existed in the web of mystery woven round the old Storehouse. Now even the doubtful situation already accepted was found to be unreal. And where no clues had existed, a dozen appeared. But whither did they point? Opinions differed.

Before the inquest, Forbes, for his own satisfaction, strove to bring method into the minds of himself and Mr. Bowden. He had heard all the inspector could tell him, and found that Samuel was content for the present to keep Richard under strict surveillance.

"I've always suspected a fake," declared the detective; "but there seemed to be no possible reason or excuse for a fake, and so I held on. We've proved, since we found the way up into the gable, that a man looking out of that hole under the roof would have seen, not only the boat behind which we were hidden, but us also. From the window beneath he could not have seen us; but from the hole above, his angle of vision was enlarged and see us he did. There was light enough

to see the boat, and there was light enough to see us. He looked out carefully, remember, before he lowered the corpse to the ground. My point is that he knew we were there before he committed himself to that action. That's an extraordinary opinion, perhaps, but it's made still more probable by the proved fact that Joe Baggs never took part in the meeting behind the wall, which I heard three nights ago. He has sworn, when we examined him with an independent interpreter, that he wasn't there and knew nothing whatever about any order to have his boat at the Black Rocks on the morning of Sunday. When they went to arrest him, he was certainly in bed and asleep. Another point. Anybody behind the wall could have safely pretended that he was having a conversation with Joe, because Joe can't speak. Therefore, a listener would not expect to hear more than one voice after Joe's name was mentioned."

"That's right," admitted Bowden, "but you heard Joe make that peculiar noise of his once or twice, before his talk with the unknown began."

"Anybody could have imitated that sound. Shut your eyes and listen."

The inspector obeyed and Forbes imitated the exact raucous and peculiar note familiar to all who knew Joe Baggs. It was odd and distinctive, but easily produced.

"I heard it," continued Forbes, "and naturally associated it with Baggs. When, therefore, a little later, I heard somebody speaking, I assumed there were two men behind the wall. Now I know there was but one; and much more than that fol-

lows. The man who appeared to be making that appointment was doing nothing of the kind. He was setting a trap for me; and I promptly fell in."

"But why? What had he to gain?"

"If we knew that, we should be a long way to knowing who he was."

"You can't connect the voice with anybody?"

"So little that I don't associate anybody with it for a moment. And that's one of the reasons why, despite the growing evidence, I don't feel that Richard Rivers is our man. It's a curious fact that I did begin to suspect him very strongly before these things happened; but intuition will often run counter to deduction, and the more I've studied this chap since his dead father was found, the less can I bring myself to believe he has had anything to do with it. And that despite the massive new evidence against him."

"That is a curious fact, sure enough," answered Bowden. "It's just the other way with me. In my case you may say deduction confounds intuition. It even confounds my bed-rock knowledge of Richard from his childhood. Until Sunday morning I would have sworn Dick was innocent; but now I certainly would not. Evidence is evidence. I grant it defies character and contradicts everything I know about the boy and his life; but how can you get over the evidence?"

"You can't, Bowden. You can only remember that every item of it is circumstantial and leave him for a minute. What I want to fix in your mind is the singular fact that the man hidden in the ruin—now certainly out of it and God knows

where—knew that the place was watched that night. He acted on that assumption, deliberately furnished evidence of the murder of George Rivers by handing us the corpse, and then, clearly enough, bolted himself by the tunnel. That means, of course, that he had an accomplice, because only from the cellar of Monks could the timber baulks have been pulled down. Somebody went there while we watched the Storehouse and made the coast clear for somebody else to escape. It was all planned with immense care by people who knew our secrets as well as we know them ourselves. But who knew our secrets?"

"It comes back, then, to the question of why they have given the murder of George Rivers away," said Bowden.

"Yes; it does."

"You can't work your pal, Raleigh Prescott, into the puzzle?"

"I cannot. He seems farther from it than ever. My hope, and my fear, too, for that matter, was that they had the dead body of my friend hidden there, and that when it was known the Store was to be pulled down, they'd possibly try and get him out. It looked as if I had judged rightly and that was what they meant to do. But the cunning devils have used our plots for their own purpose and taken the opportunity to present us with—not Prescott, but another—the man most people imagined had killed Michael Bellhanger and then made his escape."

"We may take it, then, that George Rivers never killed Bellhanger?"

"I never thought he had, and I don't now; but we still don't know. This doesn't throw any light at all on Bellhanger's murder. We've got the diary found on the body of George Rivers, to show that he did leave the Store—the little pocket diary in which he noted his engagements. It's a familiar object, apparently, and Saul Baggs, at 'The Blue Peter,' and others tell me they had often seen him note an appointment in it. His appointment with Michael Bellhanger for the Storehouse on the night of the fifteenth of November was noted, and then nothing else till his appointment with 'Dick' for the night of the twenty-third of November."

"The date Prescott disappeared."

"Yes; I'd marked that. But, between those dates, there's nothing. We know he left West Haven for Yeovil the night of his appointment with Bellhanger, because he was seen at West Haven station, where he got his ticket, and also seen at Knighton by his brother and by the station master, Mr. Bright. Therefore, we still cannot prove that he didn't kill Bellhanger."

"We've got to remember that he was called away by a forged letter, too."

"Yes; but now we certainly know he came back—alive, or dead. There's the appointment with 'Dick' for the twenty-third of November, which, of course, suggests that he came back then, or sooner; and there's his dead body to show he certainly did come back."

"But Dr. Colfax can't say when he died. The dead man might have been killed on the twenty-third, or some days sooner, or some days

later. He's been sealed up from the air and he had no wounds."

"The manner of his death is another puzzle," answered Forbes. "The Home Office man, Professor Bouverie, doesn't know yet how he died—so Colfax tells me. There's not a scratch on him."

"There's only one bright thing to it—that you don't believe Richard had any hand in the job. If you don't, I'll try not to."

"Against my own reason I do not. What does his uncle say?"

"Patrick's terrible put about, both for his brother's dreadful end and for Richard. Of course he swears that the boy's innocent. He'll be thankful to God to know you feel the same. He thinks you've got a down on Dick and reckons that you mean to hand it to him at the inquest. You'll need to watch the veterinary, because, though a mild-mannered man, he can be obstinate, and he'll stick at nothing to save the chap—of that I'm positive."

"He'd help him to get away?"

"If it came to the worst, he would. He may be laying his plans for it. You see, so far, it's been kept close from Dick that he's suspected of anything. Patrick swore to tell him nought and he hasn't, because Dick's going about as cheerful as he dares to be with his father dead. He's got the idea this proves that George Rivers didn't kill Bellhanger, which is all that matters to him; but he doesn't know about the diary and the rope and the tarpaulin overcoat the dead man was tied up in. Nobody does but you and me and the

doctor and Walpole. Yes; Pat Rivers has kept his word to you. He hasn't given a hint to Richard that he's suspected. And, as for Richard being cheerful despite the fearful fate of his father—that's natural, too, in a way, because he never cared a straw for the old man. He's sorry for his end, of course, but he feels that it's proved George Rivers didn't commit murder, so his father's name is cleared; and that makes such a vital difference to him with Phyllis that he can't help being gay despite himself."

"His father's name is not cleared, unless the inquest does more than I think it will," answered Forbes.

Meanwhile, little guessing what the inquest would bring forth, or supposing that anybody entertained a shadow of doubt concerning himself, Richard's thoughts turned to his sweetheart.

He would not see the body of his father, nor did Patrick Rivers press him to do so. Dick had long believed that his parent was dead and the fact came as no great shock to him. He troubled little about details and assumed the innocence of George Rivers established by his death. Indeed most people were glad to do the same, though that assumption only increased the mystery. To Monks went Dick on the evening of Sunday and brought with him his extraordinary news. Mrs. Bellhanger and her daughter had already heard it, and not only Phyllis took colour from Dick's conviction and was thankful to share his opinion, but her mother also now believed George Rivers to be an innocent man. She asserted her conviction to the joy of

the lovers, and then they left her and went out together.

A friendly fate thus willed that on the threshold of their most poignant trials and a coming agony destined to leave its mark upon their lives for ever, they should be granted these few and peaceful hours. For it seemed to both of them that they were now united to part no more. Love-blinded and mightily longing each for the other, they saw in the death of Dick's father a reason for personal hope; and thus they enjoyed some moments of pure happiness and awakened trust in the future before subsequent events shattered it. On the verge of new terrors and in the shadow of death they moved contented, lost to the world for a while, ignorant of the gathering clouds that were blowing up for them a storm more terrific than even the dark past had held. The good hours sped swiftly enough; but they looked back at them afterwards and found, in that renewed companionship and understanding, strength sufficient to support a trial that swiftly promised eternal separation.

Now, though their voices were hushed and their mood pensive before the shocking discovery of the previous night, the fact that they were together again and their future assured, awoke a blessed peace and content in their young hearts. Neither looked ahead: the hour of reunion was enough for that star-lit walk, and they felt the future in their subconscious minds as a precious certainty. Therefore, they dwelt in the present and on themselves alone.

“How would you like me to turn farmer in earnest now and presently come to Monks?” he asked. “Your mother doesn’t see how she can stay, not being a farmer herself, and yet I well know it would break her heart to go. What would she think, Phyllis, if I did as Uncle Pat advised and went to Millchester Training College for a year and then came and took up the farm for her?”

“It’s too good to be true, Dick. Such fairy stories don’t happen.”

“This one well might. I’m very fond of Mrs. Bellhanger—first because she’s your mother so I was bound to be, and secondly because she’s always believed in me and been kind.”

“That’s true enough, Dick.”

“And that being so, I think we could all live very happy together. I’ve got ideas. I shall invite Uncle Pat to go to ‘The Blue Peter.’ He may not care about the work, but it would be lighter for him than what he does, and he’d do better out of it. Then the Red Field will belong to your mother right away. I make that over as soon as the lawyer can draw it up. I shall move in a lot of matters as soon as ever my poor father’s been buried.”

“Will he lie with your mother, Dick?”

“He will. The grave was planned for both.”

“I’ve often thought of your mother and wished I’d known her, but I never did. I was only just born when she died.”

“I was four years old. I’ve got a faint sort of

picture of her—patient and good. Even father was always pretty gentle when he talked about her.”

They returned to themselves presently and built castles in the air, forgetting time and space and the nature of things in their happy dreamland. Then Richard brought Phyllis home again, saw Mrs. Bellhanger for a few moments and departed.

On the following Wednesday the inquest opened and, having regard for the extraordinary nature of the case, the Home Office sent a representative; while when he heard that this was to be done, Patrick Rivers, who very well knew where the inquiry must lead, engaged a Bridegate lawyer of County Court reputation, to represent the late man's family. Mr. Rivers found himself in an awkward position, for he could not guess how much Forbes and his friend Bowden proposed to tell. The circumstantial evidence, if it did not actually condemn Richard, would certainly create suspicion sufficient to arrest him; but Patrick had spoken with Martin Forbes and been greatly relieved to learn that he did not believe Richard guilty, although he could not deny that he was involved. He found the detective more communicative than his own life-long friend, for Bowden would not discuss the matter, but only expressed a hope that the inquest might furnish some unexpected evidence to exonerate his nephew from any suspicion.

“I warn you,” he said to Bowden, “I warn you, Samuel, that I'm looking ahead in this matter. I

know, as well as you do in your heart, that Dick had no hand in these deviltries and, law or no law, I'll stick at nothing if he's attacked."

"I can't listen if you talk like that, Pat," answered the other. "I do hope still, though sorely driven to doubt, that your nephew may be an innocent man, or at worst a tool, and I hope to God the law will prove him innocent every way. We've yet got to hear the man himself, remember, for he hasn't a thought in his head that anybody's suspecting him. In fact, the way he takes his father's death is a very strong argument for him. If he'd known about it, and what happened in secret, and when it was all to come out, he'd have pretended a lot more feeling than he has. As a precaution, he'd have been knocked over and distressed and so on. But, as you know, he's never turned a hair—'callous' people might call it, who didn't understand the circumstances. But, be it as it will, the majesty of the Law must be respected. The Law may make a mistake now and again, and I grant it beats its makers sometimes; but no such thing will happen here. You've got Wharnclyff to represent your interests—a very clever man is Lawyer Wharnclyff—and Government will send down somebody for the Crown, so have no fear we shall not probe deep and get to the bottom if we can."

"I see no reason to hope it," answered the other. "To get to the bottom, you must get to the man who left the Store on Sunday morning after sending my poor brother down from the roof by a rope."

"It's a mighty snarl, I grant," admitted Samuel, "and I and Forbes no longer see eye to eye about it. He believes Joe Baggs, for example. He thinks now that the talk behind the wall was a trap for him and that Joe was never there. But I'm none too sure even of that, because Joe's a queer old bird at best, and though his tongue is still, his ears are long. He may have very likely heard what was doing here and there and found that he was going to be arrested, and so kept his bed and broke his promise to the unknown. And as for the unknown himself, all he knew was that the house-breakers were coming next morning. And he knew he'd got George Rivers murdered up under the roof, where the house-breakers' work would begin, and so he had to move if he didn't want the murder out."

"Granted, Sam; but why should he do a damned silly thing like that? He probably knows the Storehouse better than any other living creature, and if he'd wanted to be safe, the last thing he'd have plotted would be a get-away to a boat. He might have felt it was time he was off himself, but what was the good of showing up my brother's body—flinging it in our faces, you may say?"

"He didn't think he was doing any such thing," answered Bowden. "That's what Forbes thinks, too, and he's wrong. The unknown believed the watch was called off that night and that it was just a bit of rare luck come his way to enable him to hide the evidence of his crime and so assure his own safety. That's how I figure it, and that's what we plotted for him to do from the first."

"Never, Samuel," answered Mr. Rivers with conviction. "Don't you believe it. If the man wasn't mad, he knew the Storehouse would be watched that night."

"I'm not saying he wasn't mad, Pat," replied the Inspector. "There's a lot about it that do look as mad as you could wish. If a man like Martin Forbes, with a mind trained to get reason into crime, can't see what this devil is after, then you mustn't expect that we shall. But union is strength and the inquest may throw some light into the tangle."

On the fifth of December another jury viewed another corpse and the inquest opened upon the remains of the late innkeeper.

Professor Bouverie, who represented the Home Office, was in some haste to return to London, and Dr. Bull took his evidence as soon as the body of George Rivers had been viewed. The public room in which the coroner's court was held failed to contain a half of those who desired to enter it.

"You cannot," said the coroner, "give us the cause of death, Professor Bouverie?"

The great criminologist, who had mastered particulars of the case, made an interesting reply.

"It is impossible to speak with certainty, yet a probable reason is within our reach," he began. "In the first place the time of death appears doubtful. Means were taken to preserve the body—not by injection or any embalming process, but by protecting it from the air under conditions of which as yet the police know nothing. There is a faint smell of tobacco, or nicotine, which saturates

the clothing of the corpse, and its condition is such that even an approximate date of death seems hard to state. Mr. Colfax shares my opinion that George Rivers has been dead perhaps a fortnight, or even three weeks. That would probably be the limit; while on the other hand, he may have lost his life not more than ten days ago. There is no wound or injury of any kind and the organs are all healthy and in excellent preservation. I can only suppose that he died under an anæsthetic. There is a modicum of evidence to support that theory. We discover no actual evidence of chloroform, or any other agent to induce insensibility and death, but chloroform occasionally has been detected several weeks after death from its inhalation. Yet I feel disposed to suspect it, seeing that no lesion or indication of any ailment or injury exists. And I am the more inclined to this opinion because there persists a fluid and dark condition of the blood. This is the only evidence of chloroform inhalation. I submit, therefore, though without much assurance, that George Rivers may have been chloroformed to death. If not, I cannot see how he came to his end. But if that were so, it follows that he may have died far away from the Storehouse and been brought back there afterwards."

"Might such a death have happened by accident, Professor?"

"It might, of course. Men have lost their lives under chloroform often enough."

"You have formed no theory of what has happened?"

“I have not. I should suspect murder, seeing the subsequent mystery and the condition of the corpse when lowered from the Storehouse, but we do not know enough, it seems, to speak with any certainty. Murder, however, may be safely assumed, since there was no reason why Rivers should have been put under chloroform by any professional physician. He must have been a hale and hearty man for his years.”

The Professor was not submitted to further questions and soon went his way. Then Martin Forbes described his experience at length and told how a black or masked man had lowered the dead body from beneath the gable; how the rope had been flung down when the corpse reached the ground; and how no more was seen or heard after that event.

“My conviction,” said he, “is that Inspector Bowden and I were seen, and that while he could not draw back the corpse, the unknown man was yet able, by collusion from without, to make good his own escape.”

“You consider that he got away through the tunnel to Monks, which was found open afterwards?”

“I do think so.”

“And that argues the unknown man had friends outside?”

“It proves it, since he could not have opened the tunnel himself.”

Each of the watchers then took oath that they had seen nothing while they guarded the Storehouse on Sunday morning, and next Inspector

Bowden gave testimony concerning the corpse. After various minor details he proceeded.

“It was wrapped in a tarpaulin, rough weather coat such as the fishermen use. Inside that was some old sail-cloth, probably from the sail-loft, where there is a heap of old, rotting stuff. Then came the dead man in his clothes. All had been bound round with lengths of a new hemp rope. The coat belonged to ‘The Blue Peter’ and had Mr. Richard Rivers’ name in it. It hung in the stable and was put on by anybody who happened to want it. Mr. Rivers himself had not used it for a long time. The rope is part of a hank of fifty yards, recently bought by the late Mr. George Rivers for ‘The Blue Peter’ and stored outside in the toolhouse. It had twenty-five yards cut off, and the ropes that bound up the corpse, together with the piece used to lower it down to the beach, represent twenty-five yards. On the body were found ten shillings and eight pence in a leather purse, a pencil, a bunch of keys and a pocket-book. The pocket-book contained nothing but a newspaper cutting and a small diary. The last two entries in it alone concern the case, so far as we know. Mr. Rivers had marked down to meet Mr. Bellhanger at the Store at five-thirty on the fifteenth of November, and, under the date of November the twenty-third, he had written ‘Meet Dick Store midnight.’ ”

Mr. Bowden ceased and Dr. Bull asked a question.

“That was the night preceding the adjourned

inquest—the night that Mr. Prescott, the detective, disappeared?”

“It was, Doctor.”

“We had better call Mr. Rivers,” suggested the representative of the Crown, and Dick entered the box and took the oath.

He was puzzled, but in no way concerned. Apparently he failed to see the grave implications of the evidence. The Home Office lawyer, at Dr. Bull’s direction, asked him questions.

“You and the late Mr. George Rivers were father and son, I understand?”

“That is so.”

“And not on the best of terms?”

Wharncliff, for Richard, prepared to object to the question, but Richard answered.

“No—not on the best of terms by any means.”

“Why not?”

“My father was impatient with me for my love of sport. He wanted me to be a lawyer.”

“And you had no ambition that way?”

“God forbid,” said Richard, smiling.

The laugh was silenced.

“Did you ever have sharp words with your father?”

“Yes; but I was just setting seriously about making changes. If he had lived, I should soon have convinced him that I was good for something and have won his respect.”

“What had induced your sudden ambitions to do better?”

“I had become engaged to be married and knew I must take life seriously.”

"May I ask if the late Mr. Bellhanger supported your engagement to his daughter?"

"He did. He believed in me. It was to be known as soon as my father sold him the field."

"You are still engaged?"

"Yes, sir. It was broken off after Mr. Bellhanger's death, while there remained a fear that my father might have been responsible. But now we all know my father never did it and I am engaged again."

"How do you know that he never did it?"

"We feel he did not. We are positive. The only people who matter to me are Mrs. Bellhanger and her daughter, and they feel the same as I do, that my father was a victim and didn't commit any crime."

"What of the tarpaulin coat with your name on it?"

"It was nearly worn out, so I left it hanging in the stable for anybody who might chance to need it. It disappeared a week or ten days ago."

"Disappeared?"

"Yes. I wanted it myself for five minutes in the pouring rain and asked Tipping, the ostler, for it, and he said it was missing. He thought a tramp had sneaked it."

"And the rope?"

"We only found a part of that had been cut off and taken three days ago. Then we wanted a piece and found the hank had been cut and half was gone."

"You can tell me nothing whatever about this business, Rivers?"

"Nothing whatever, sir."

"You've heard all particulars and they convey no idea to you?"

"None; I see no explanation that covers one of the points, let alone all."

"Where were you on the night of the twenty-third of November—the night that Prescott went into the tunnel and was never seen again?"

"I went to bed that night about my usual hour."

"That is——"

"Eleven o'clock as near as can be—sometimes a little earlier, sometimes a little later."

"Can you prove you were in your room by eleven on that night?"

Richard reflected.

"No; I can't prove it. But I was indoors that night and occupied till I went to bed. I was certainly in. I wasn't out late till Saturday night."

"We'll come to Saturday night in a moment. On this night of November the twenty-third you had heard from Miss Bellhanger that Prescott was opening the tunnel and going down it?"

"Yes—she told me that evening."

"Now as to last Saturday night. You knew nothing whatever as to what was being done at the Storehouse?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Either by people inside, or the watchers outside?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Yet you were out late that night?"

"Yes; I went to bed as usual, but rose to write a particular letter. Then I went out with it."

Dick, under continued examination, declared that he had posted his note to Phyllis in the letter-box of Monks and then straightway departed. He had not entered the house, or opened any window. He was familiar with the house and had been in the cellar, when he went through the tunnel with Forbes and the police on one or two occasions after Prescott's disappearance. More he was not asked and on being dismissed he joined some friends. It was not until they spoke to him that he began to realise a shadow on their faces. He made no attempt to leave the inquest. Forbes was watching him, while minor testimony of detail was taken, and, as the suggestion that he at least might know the secret of his father's murder filtered into Richard's mind, the detective felt his own convictions strengthened.

From amused incredulity to astonishment, horror and indignation, Richard passed. And then the watching man detected utter bewilderment and a shadowy fear, but of guilt he saw no sign.

Meantime, various points were made, though none to help the main inquiry. P. C. Webster described how he had found the entrance to the roof. It lay far back under the tiles and had been concealed on previous visits under a litter of lath and plaster and broken timbers. But on the occasion of his last visit, to lower the corpse, the unknown had doubtless found no leisure to conceal it on his departure. Entering from outside by a ladder with Forbes, as soon as day dawned, on Sunday, the policeman, after some search, had discovered the hole in a corner, where the roof was

but two feet above his head; and he had descended steps, that ran through the wall, as those of the secret passage already known, and emerged, even as that did, in a chimney below.

“We ought to have found it before,” said Webster. “I’ve worked up every other chimney from every hearth in the Storehouse since. There are eight of them scattered about. But none of the others has anything hid.”

“A strong man could have carried the body up under the roof, then?” asked Dr. Bull.

“Pretty easily. Or Mr. Rivers might have gone up alive and been put out when he was up there.”

“You discovered no sign or smell of tobacco?”

“Not a trace, sir. I’ve looked specially since, for there may be some old dump of the smugglers still buried there. But the more you know of the ins and outs of that great barracks, the more you feel there is to be known.”

Patrick Rivers was next called with reference to his discovery on the early morning of Sunday. He spoke frankly and astounded Richard, who was listening to him, for he had kept his word and, until now, Dick was not aware that his uncle had anything to do with the business at Monks.

“I went along with Inspector Bowden to prove that Monks was all right,” explained Mr. Rivers. “He said it was a matter of form and Forbes wished it. Until then I had no idea that the people inside the Store—if there were people—were supposed to have friends in West Haven helping them from outside. But then Samuel—Mr. Bowden—

told me the detective had come to think it might be possible, though not probable."

"Stick to facts, Mr. Rivers," said the coroner.

"We went up to see that the cellar hole was blocked; and on the way we saw my nephew, Richard Rivers, coming down from Monks. Then I hid with the key, which the Inspector gave me, and when Dick had overtaken him and they were gone down the hill, I went on to Monks and let myself in, lighted a lamp and went down to the cellar. The key of the cellar door was inside the house in the lock. But the door was open, and when I came to the baulks hitched across the hole, I found two were down."

"They couldn't have been moved from the tunnel?"

"Impossible. Forbes fixed them himself. They could be moved in a few minutes from the cellar, but an elephant couldn't have broke them down from the other side."

"There was room for a man to have emerged?"

"Yes—barely. Still there was room."

"You saw nobody?"

"Nobody. I listened for a bit, but there was no sound. Then I left everything as I found it, and locked the cellar door after me and came up and sat in the kitchen till Bowden arrived."

"How long would it have been from the time the body was slung down, to the time you found the tunnel open?"

"I couldn't say. It was some time after the body came down that the watchers at the entrances

round the Store were told. Mr. Bowden would know."

"You might reckon it at half an hour, or a little less," said Samuel. "After the body came down, Forbes and I waited, one on each side of the south door for a minute. Then he left me and went round to the watchers. Then he came back to me and we talked to the two who had been to arrest Baggs. Then he remembered the exit at Monks and told me to go up and take another with me to see it was all right. Mr. Rivers and I started, say twenty minutes after the body came down and we saw the last of the black man. Four or five minutes later we saw Dick Rivers; and four or five minutes after that Patrick would have been in the Monks cellar. You might call it twenty-five minutes."

"Would that have given a man time to descend from the roof of the Storehouse, get into the secret passage and down to the tunnel and up to Monks?"

Mr. Rivers looked at Bowden again.

"That I can't say," he answered.

It was Martin Forbes who replied.

"Plenty of time," he said. "A man who knew both passages could get down from that roof and up to Monks in fifteen minutes, or less."

The detective presently occupied the witness box himself, but he furnished no evidence of particular value. He desired to learn the contents of the will of George Rivers and certain other facts concerning him that would demand delay and a visit to the dead man's lawyer. Mr. Secretan, who was

in the Coroner's Court, agreed to meet the detective in two days and give access to the will. Asked to state his explanation of what had happened, Forbes answered very briefly.

"I think we have here the victims of a plant—a put-up thing. The whole story reads unreal—even absurd. That body was lowered down for us to find, in my opinion. The unknown man doubtless knew all about what was being done and arranged with somebody outside to reveal the fact that George Rivers was dead."

"Do you think that 'somebody outside' was Richard Rivers?"

"I do not."

"Does it strike you that it might have been Richard Rivers inside?" asked the representative of the Crown.

"No—unless we are to suppose there is another way into the Store which we don't know. Every entrance was watched all the time."

The lawyer smiled.

"Think again," he said. "Monks wasn't watched. A back window stood open. Suppose that at midnight, or earlier, Richard Rivers had gone to Monks, let himself in by the back window, which, no doubt, might have been easily done, opened the tunnel, proceeded to the Storehouse, lowered the dead man to the beach, then returned the way he came?"

"If he had done so, he would have concealed all evidence," replied Forbes, "and blocked the exit at Monks after he came back through it. I grant, however, the precautions at Monks were incom-

plete, and what you suggest might have been done —by somebody.”

“Where was Ernest Norman that night?” asked a juryman.

“I’ve inquired,” replied Bowden. “Norman, as it happens, was out of West Haven with his wife. They went to his married sister from Saturday till Monday: that can be proved. They were as far off as Lyme Regis.”

The inquest was then adjourned.

CHAPTER XII

THAT night Martin Forbes and Inspector Bowden sat together at the latter's private house and discussed the inquiry. On the adjournment, Dr. Bull and the Crown lawyer pressed for the immediate arrest of young Rivers, while Bowden prepared to obey and Martin Forbes earnestly begged for postponement. He pointed to the fact that Rivers was under his close observation and had no intention of evading the law.

"Not until today did the man even perceive that he was an object of suspicion," he had said. "If ever anybody was innocent he is. I know it for a thousand reasons and I'd be the last to give him a loophole if I didn't know it. But I attach importance to certain documents we have not yet been able to see. They are with Mr. Secretan of Bridegate, the Rivers' lawyer, and I'll ask you to delay the arrest for at least twenty-four hours till after I've seen them and considered their bearing on the past. The will must be read. There's something in my mind—growing—and it's about the strangest thing that I ever found myself up against. But it's solid. One knows very swiftly by instinct and experience if a deduction has any real value, and I feel about what I'm thinking now that, extraordinary though it is, there may be

something in it. At any rate, I'll stand for Dick if you'll trust him twenty-four hours. Shadow if you feel that should be done, but don't arrest. You may spoil my plans if you do."

The representatives of the law agreed to his earnest entreaty in this matter and parted, not to meet again until the adjourned inquest was re-opened. But it had been understood that Forbes accepted all responsibility for Richard Rivers, and that if nothing shortly arose to prove him innocent, the warrant already in Bowden's hands should be served.

Inspector Bowden now brought out his bottle of whiskey and lighted his pipe, while Forbes also smoked. The policeman was weary and complained of the cold on his chest. As usual, at times of disappointment or passing ill health, he talked of retiring. Then he returned to the matter in hand, deplored the fact that his last case should be a failure, and asked Forbes why the dead man's will so much interested him.

But the other had nothing to say in explanation at this moment.

"Maybe you'll see when you hear it," he answered, "or I may be quite wrong."

"I've been told to shadow young Rivers, anyway; and arrest him tomorrow if you have no good reason against. The Home Office order it."

At this juncture Richard's uncle arrived. He had hoped to find his friend alone and conversation waned for a while in his presence. But there was no other subject common to the three, and Patrick stopped on somewhat stubbornly in ex-

pectation that the detective would presently take his leave.

Forbes retraced the incidents of the inquest and addressed his remarks to the last comer.

"I don't want you to think I'm against your nephew, Mr. Rivers," he said. "I was at the start, but I am not now, and when we're through this thing, as I hope we yet may be, I feel as sure as you do that Richard is going to come out clear. But we can't fail to see how it looks on the evidence to those who know nothing about him. Time and again—by an extraordinary coincidence, or series of coincidences, as I think—we find Dick cropping up. Yet, unless he was the greatest actor on earth, he couldn't have killed his father, or helped at such a business, and be, as he is now, more or less of a happy man."

"Can't they see that?" asked the veterinary surgeon. "Do they for one instant imagine that a man of my nephew's stamp could commit such crimes as these?"

"The law doesn't trouble about character if there is abundant evidence," answered Forbes, "and the incriminating evidence is abundant. You heard that chap this morning—sharp as a needle he was—actually suggest that Dick might not only have opened the tunnel end at Monks, but been the one to come and go through it himself! Well, it's perfectly true: he might have been. Nobody can prove he didn't. Yet I know, as surely as I'm sitting in this chair, that he didn't. Again, he might have been the one to hide the Derringer in that iron box in the office at the inn; he might

have been the man Prescott told me he heard one night moving over his head in the Storehouse. And the evening they found Michael Bellhanger dead, and you and the station-master saw George Rivers on his way to Yeovil, Richard, you remember, didn't turn up till a very late hour."

"He explained where he'd been, however," said Richard's uncle.

"Yes; he always explained, and I believe he always told the truth; but that's only a matter of opinion after long study of him. I can't prove anything."

"The diary and the date. Why didn't they go into that?" asked Patrick. "The words were just scribbled in pencil; but suppose my brother never wrote them? Suppose another hand put them there?"

Inspector Bowden stared.

"That's an idea!" he said. "Nobody ever questioned but George wrote the appointment down."

"I did," declared Forbes, "and I'll say more. I don't believe he ever made that second entry—for a very good reason. I'm keeping that, however, for an expert to check. Don't say anything about it for the minute. We'll go on with Richard. I want you to see how it must look to the coroner and the Crown lawyer."

"And to me," declared Bowden.

"To you, Samuel?" asked his friend. "Are you turned against him?"

"I wouldn't say that, but you can't let sentiment blind you to facts," answered the other.

"The final point they'll make is this," con-

tinued Forbes: "that Richard was the only man in West Haven that night, barring Raleigh Prescott himself, who knew my chum was going down the tunnel. We've heard nothing about Prescott today, but we're going to hear a great deal more about him, I hope."

"We know where Dick was that night."

"No, Mr. Rivers. We only know where he said he was—at 'The Blue Peter.' I believe him, mind you, but my word carries no weight. The Law's a thing without bowels or soul. Each man does what he believes his duty: the machine moves all."

"I know it," answered Rivers, "and we've got to act accordingly. If your word carries no weight, as you say, then those who care for Richard will have no bowels, either, and do what they think their duty."

"Don't you threaten, Pat," warned the Inspector. "Don't you say things you might be sorry for."

But the other was perturbed.

"All right, all right. You're warning me now, I suppose, that anything I speak you'll use against me."

Bowden flushed, but did not answer, and Mr. Rivers spoke again.

"Perhaps I'd better be on my way. Maybe you'd rather have my room than my company, Samuel? So be it, then. I'd thought—however, if you're against Dick—you of all men—then I mustn't count for a welcome here again. And God knows I never want one."

"You forget a good bit of the past to let your-

self say such things against me," answered Samuel.

"I don't forget you're against Richard—that's all that matters just now. That wipes out the past, I can assure you. Good-night; good-night, Forbes. Try and make this man be a man and not a bit of a senseless machine."

He rose and in deep agitation went his way, while his old friend stared after him.

"To think of that now!" he murmured. "After very near forty years!"

"Are you surprised?" asked the other.

"He's against us—mark that. He's an awful stubborn man when he's roused. He'll put an oar in now, I shouldn't wonder."

Suddenly Patrick Rivers thrust his head into the room again.

"I may tell you that you're a fool for your pains, Samuel. I'm on the track of some things that you might have been mightily glad to know."

"I haven't deserted Dick, my dear man."

"Yes, you have—and worse. You think he's guilty of something—God knows what—of killing and trussing up his own father, apparently, and blowing Bellhanger's brains out, too, I suppose, and doing away with Prescott, also—just the sort of things a young, honourable, respectable man would do, of course."

"If you know anything, Patrick——"

"Too late now. You're against us. You're against Richard and me. I only want you to understand that you've made a big mistake, and yet may live to see this thing cleared up over your

head before many days are passed, and no credit for you—none—only scorn!”

He was off and Forbes smiled at the policeman's bewilderment.

“You've done it, Inspector. You've properly put the man's back up now. He won't trust you a yard after tonight.”

“He lost his temper and his wits both, seemingly, and I don't want him to trust me,” answered Samuel; “but if he knows anything we don't, the Law's got to make him speak, and it will do so.”

“Bluff—he doesn't know anything. He only wanted to make you angry. I'll be off now. I must get down to ‘The Blue Peter.’ Rivers may forget his promise to you after this flare-up.”

But Martin Forbes was mistaken. Richard's uncle had not repaired to the hotel. He roamed elsewhere, went home, rummaged in his desk, collected a considerable amount of money, and presently tramped up to Monks Farm, where he guessed that his nephew would be.

Phyllis and Richard were wandering through the night together, but Mrs. Bellhanger answered Patrick's knock and he was glad to find her alone for a moment.

“There's serious trouble in the wind,” he said, “and I'm going to act and chance it.”

“Trouble—more?”

“You haven't heard. I suppose no decent person has. These cursed lawyers are after Richard since this morning. The fools can't see he's had no hand in these fearful things, and because of

some two-penny, half-penny coincidences, are fastening on him and going to lock him up."

"Richard? Surely the fact that his father's dead——"

"They think he knew it. They go so far as to hint he might—but weren't you at the inquest?"

"No. There was no call for me to go," said Mary.

"You'd have heard what you wouldn't have believed," he answered.

"But Mr. Forbes knows Richard personally and thinks very well of him."

"Forbes is all right and understands. But he's free to think for himself; Bowden is not—he's a slave. He has got to obey orders, and what's more he's turned against Richard."

"Mr. Bowden has!"

"Yes, and I've done with him. He's a traitor, in my opinion. We must act now, and the quicker the better. I overheard a word or two they didn't think I had heard. Richard will be arrested tomorrow and a clue that I'm after all bitched up. I believe I've got a clue that may be valuable. But if they take Richard tomorrow, my chance is gone. We must get him away while we can."

Mrs. Bellhanger was alarmed and indignant.

"Who knows the boy best—us or them?" she asked.

"It's all Bowden's fault, I believe," answered Mr. Rivers. "He might well have gone bail for Richard, or I might, and promised to bring him up when they wanted him. But once arrest him

and then you have half England turned against him, and his character marred for evermore. I feared this was coming, from what I heard the coroner say after the inquest was broken off. And I've moved against it, and since tonight I judge myself free of all promises. Dick shan't be locked up if I can prevent it."

"But how can you?"

"I can, and I'm going to. I've thought it out since I left Bowden. We must act tonight."

"Tonight, Mr. Rivers!"

"Yes, faith. Tomorrow will be too late."

They talked and she asked for particulars of his intention, but Patrick declined to furnish them.

"Don't hear any details whatever," he said, "and then you won't have to tell any lies afterwards. The less you know, the better. You'll be questioned pretty sharp when they want him tomorrow and can't find him. You shall hear everything afterwards, not before."

Richard and Phyllis returned a little later and the girl was troubled and glad to see Mr. Rivers.

"A very strange thing has happened," she said. "We were followed. I didn't believe it at first and Richard hardly believes it yet, but it's true. I proved it. There was a man slinking after us. I'm positive. I saw him—just a glimpse—a shadow. I believe he's outside now, waiting for Dick."

"If it's anybody, it must be the police," declared Richard blankly; and his uncle explained that no mistake existed.

"It's true—they're shadowing you—that's why

I'm here," he said. "We're up against it and this business has been sprung at a very critical time. Something told me after the inquest that I must be working for you today, and I heard tonight what it was. You're suspected of knowing more than you've told—just when I believe I've got a line on the truth. But I've got to go slow and they're going fast."

"Who are going fast?" asked Dick.

"These Law people who were at the inquest, and Bull, the coroner—Bowden, too. It's the devil, but we've got the start of them. You're to be arrested tomorrow. You would have been today but for Forbes. I gather he wants a little longer, but they won't trouble about what he wants. It's the evidence they're going on. I've made a plan, however. You must clear out, Dick, till I've got my clue."

"Good God! That is what that lawyer was after, then, this morning?"

"That's just what he was after," said Mary.

"Forbes doesn't think it? He's told me in so many words he doesn't," declared Richard.

"He doesn't, but he can't prevent the Crown arresting you tomorrow if you're on the spot to be arrested. And you mustn't be. Once in their hands, who can tell when you'll be out of them again? The evidence, such as it is, runs against you, so they say."

Phyllis spoke.

"Dick, you must do what your Uncle Pat advises. I beg and implore it."

"Cut and run? Never."

"I've made the plan," explained Mr. Rivers, "but I want to keep it from Mrs. Bellhanger and everybody else but you yourself, so that, when your friends are questioned, they can swear they know nothing. You must be safe and out of the way for a bit till I lay bare the truth, as I believe I may be able to do. But you've got to show them a pair of heels tonight for everybody's sake. They're a pack of blind fools, but they have the power to disgrace us and they mean to—more shame to 'em."

"What do you think to do?" asked Mary Bellhanger. "If he goes out of here, he'll only be followed home."

"He mustn't go out of here. He must go out of the Store. That's the safe place tonight. There's nobody there now. Do you know the tunnel, Richard?"

The young man was dazed before this sudden assault on his freedom.

"Yes, I know it," he said. "I went down it with Forbes twice."

"So do I," answered Mr. Rivers. "I had a look at it with Samuel Bowden from the chimney end. So this is what you've got to do, as quick as you may, while that chap waits and watches for you to come out. Presently he'll give a signal, or there may be somebody with him to report. Anyway, they'll stir in an hour or two if you don't go back to 'The Blue Peter.' Now's the only time to slip them. Go down the tunnel, and Phyllis can put home the beams and lock the cellar door after you've gone. Then I'll meet you at the other

end, where the steps rise and you'll get out of the country. I've got all planned after that, and you'll lie low for a few days, then have the notice from me to return publicly."

"Is all this necessary, Uncle Pat? I hate it," said Dick.

"It is necessary, worse luck—else I wouldn't say so. I hate it worse than you do. But we've got to keep you clear and I must have twenty-four hours."

"Inspector Bowden will know you've done this, Mr. Rivers," said Mary.

"I hope he will. Then they can lock me up if they like. But they won't do that—oh, no! I know a bit too much—I've told 'em I do—and I'll work with Forbes—not Bowden."

"You'd better go, Dick, before that man outside gets suspicious," urged Phyllis. She, too, was deeply troubled.

"What shall we say if they come here tonight?" asked Mrs. Bellhanger calmly.

"Tell the truth," answered Richard's uncle. "Say he's not here; and if Bowden wakes you presently, ask him how he dares to persecute a man he knows before his God is innocent? He'll come to me tomorrow, I reckon, in a pretty lively frame of mind, and he shall hear some harsh truth if he does."

"Yes, it'll be your turn tomorrow, Mr. Rivers," foretold Mary. "Mark me, if they know you've helped Dick they'll very likely lock you up."

"Let them!" he answered. "Little satisfaction they'll get out of that."

Then he turned to Richard.

“Don’t waste more time. Get down the tunnel, and I’ll meet you at the other end. And so soon as he’s gone, Phyllis, build up again, and then both you women go to bed.”

He left them, pried about to see if any watchers were hanging round Monks and presently came upon a man within sight of the entrance. The watcher was not aware that Patrick had seen him, nor did Mr. Rivers make it appear that he had done so. The longer the plain-clothes man waited, the more time would Richard enjoy to make his departure from West Haven.

And meantime Dick did as Phyllis begged him, and, though little disposed to any such proceeding, finally obeyed, entered the tunnel with a candle and travelled down its narrow darkness to the vault wherein it opened at the other end. The place seemed to press down upon his head and elbow him, for a man of his size and height almost filled it. The jagged roof sometimes nearly reached his cap, and the dry built walls were not more than five feet apart. Only at the Storehouse exit did the roof rise and the way broaden into a high, square chamber, which was entered from above by the flight of steps.

Here Richard arrived in ten minutes after an uneventful journey and his thoughts moved quickly under the great silence. He sat where the mouth of the tunnel opened, awaited his uncle’s arrival and felt some emotion of gratitude to him, but a far keener sense of grief, misery and shame when he reflected on his own position. What in-

fernal power had caught him in this web? What trick had woven these horrors round him, until his honour and his liberty were threatened and freedom could only be preserved by the way of flight? Surely his present plight could not be the work of malignant chance alone? It seemed to him that while proceeding as he imagined in all the freedom of his own will, he had in reality taken no step of late without unseen and sinister direction. Dwelling upon the past, he began to perceive that he had actually invited suspicion at every turn; he confessed to himself that outsiders, who knew him not, might reasonably doubt his innocence. He had never considered the mystery from this angle of vision, but now realised, with growing horror, how others might well accuse him of inner knowledge if no worse.

The great silence of the tunnel wracked his nerves. Here time ceased. The stones took no account of it; and yet he heard time's tireless fingers fretting them. There was no real silence and, when he withdrew from the chaos of his own thoughts, faint sounds came to his ear from behind the dry built walls. A scrap of stone fell here; a drop of water pulsed intermittently there. From the roof of living rock hung stalactites that had perhaps taken hundreds of years in building. The place was not forgotten; nature held it in memory and inevitable things were happening every hour, every minute.

He pictured the old men—the reckless, rum-drinking smugglers who had tramped the tunnel of old with their kegs of liquor, their loads of

tobacco, their bales of foreign fabrics. Then he fell to wondering what plan his uncle had made for him. Doubtless the Storehouse was as safe as any place on earth for the moment, but when tomorrow he disappeared, would not renewed search be made here? He disliked the thought of being mewed in these subterranean holes. If he was to be hunted, let him run in the open. Then he remembered that Patrick Rivers had told him he was not to remain at the Storehouse. He had a plan; he had said that at worst the need for hiding and evasion would be brief.

Richard tried to share his uncle's optimism. He must mark time, and the truth would soon become known. That at least was a reflection to cheer him. The truth might already be in the way to discovery. He was a simple soul and he thankfully remembered that he had many good friends—precious friends. Phyllis believed in him, and her mother, also. His uncle knew that he was innocent; Forbes was also satisfied. A wave of anger heated Richard and he cursed the brutal, blundering work of the Law that had flung suspicion of these vile crimes upon his honest shoulders. For all he knew some fiend still crawled, like a scorpion, in this labyrinth, and none could discover him, track him down and crush him. He flamed with hatred of the unknown being—a longing to meet him face to face and deal faithfully with him. Where was God? What was He doing to suffer innocent men to die horribly by unknown hands, and another innocent to be saddled with such crimes?

At last he saw a light, at the summit of the stone stairs that descended from above, and Patrick Rivers appeared.

"All's well," he said. "Now to get a little of your own back, Richard! Phyllis was right, I may tell you. A plain-clothes man is waiting for you outside Monks."

"What'll he do?" asked Richard.

"He'll report to the police station, probably, after all lights are out at Monks. Then Bowden will turn out himself. Let him. Now lend a hand with this bag and listen to me."

CHAPTER XIII

MR. RIVERS was not sorry to hear that his old friend, the Inspector of Police, had suffered from a troublous and unsatisfactory night.

"It's all a punishment for your treachery," he said when Samuel Bowden appeared and rang him up somewhat after one o'clock.

But much had happened to Mr. Bowden during the night and much remained to happen. Things had first fallen out at Monks, and thither, soon after midnight, when Mary, her daughter and domestic servant were all gone to bed, came Samuel himself with P. C. Webster and the plain-clothes man told off to watch young Rivers. It could not be said that either Mrs. Bellhanger or Phyllis was asleep, but the elder lady suffered the police to knock more than once before rising, robing and descending to the front door.

"Who's that at this time of night?" she asked, and Bowden answered.

"I must see you, please, ma'am. Inspector Bowden is speaking."

"Wait a minute, then, and I'll put on some more clothes," she answered, and while Mary dressed in leisurely fashion, Samuel directed one constable to go to the back door, from which all the rear premises of the farm could be guarded.

"She'll say he's gone, however, and no doubt he has," declared the Inspector gloomily.

He was short and stern with Mrs. Bellhanger when she admitted him.

"It's in a nutshell," he said, "and I hope you've not put yourself within reach of the Law, for everybody knows you've suffered more than enough these days. But Richard Rivers came here last night and he wasn't seen to go again. I may tell you he's being shadowed."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because the Law's ordered him so to be since what happened at the inquest."

"D'you mean to tell me, Bowden, that you imagine that boy's had any hand in these awful things?" asked Mary, blinking her sleep-laden eyes at the lamp she had just lighted.

"I don't mean to tell you anything. Though this I will say—if he's cut and run, it's a pretty serious fact taken on top of the evidence."

"And you, knowing him all his life, think all the evidence in the world would weigh against his character?"

"I don't think anything. I'm not paid to think in this matter; I'm paid to obey orders. I'm told to shadow Richard Rivers till tomorrow at noon, when Forbes will have heard certain facts, though how they can help him, or Richard, either, I don't know. Then, in all probability, the young man will be arrested on suspicion. Character or no character, nobody can blame the Law for doing that."

"Well, what's it got to do with us if the Law's

a fool and hiding its own failure by arresting a man everybody who knows him——?"

"You mustn't waste my time nor take that line with me," interrupted Samuel sharply. "I want to know where Richard Rivers is, Mrs. Bellhanger."

"Well, I can't tell you, Inspector."

"Can't, or won't? I don't want to impart any feeling into this, but that question you'll do wisely to answer. Then I'll proceed."

"I can't, because I don't know."

"He was here at ten-thirty o'clock, and the man who followed him saw him come in with your daughter. The watcher took up a position where he could see the front door, and every now and again he went down the lane to get a sight of the back door. Mr. Patrick Rivers was here, too. He was here before Richard and Phyllis came home, and half an hour afterwards he left by himself. My man watched till midnight. Then he came to me, and I came so quickly as I was able."

"Well, Richard's not here."

"When did he go, then?"

Mrs. Bellhanger hesitated.

"He left five minutes before my daughter and I went to bed."

"That would be before all lights were out and before my man left?"

"I don't know anything about your man, Inspector."

"Will you tell me which way he went?"

"No, Inspector. I'll tell you nothing else at all."

"It may be the worse for you, Mrs. Bellhanger."

"What could be worse for me than giving an innocent man to justice?"

Bowden reflected.

"I've very little doubt in my mind that he went down the tunnel," he said.

Mary looked at him placidly.

"You ought to take something for that cough, Mr. Bowden, else it may do you lasting harm."

He rose.

"By your leave I'll look round the house, Mrs. Bellhanger."

"Certainly you shall. I'll tell Phyllis and the girl to get up and ray themselves as quickly as they can."

"No," he answered. "You'll stop just where you are, if you please. If you ain't with the Law, you're against it, ma'am. I'll search the house, and then I'll go down the tunnel."

"You'll do exactly what you think your duty, I'm sure."

She mended the dying fire and sat beside it while Patrick called in Webster, roused the other women and proceeded with his task. Phyllis and the maid quickly joined Mary in the kitchen.

A perfunctory search concluded, the Inspector presently reappeared in no good temper. He went to the door, directed Webster to join him and then declared his intention to proceed down the tunnel.

The other policeman he bade hasten to the ruin and wait outside until they rejoined him.

Mrs. Bellhanger descended before Samuel, carrying a lamp. She unlocked the cellar door, and while Webster unloosed the wooden bars from the timbers, she asked a question.

"Are we to lock the cellar door after you've gone, Mr. Bowden?"

"You can do what you please," he replied. "And you can remember this: you've stood against me tonight and will suffer for it."

"You won't have a drink of spirits before you go down?" she asked, and he grunted, turned on his electric torch and bade the constable precede him. Mary heard the angry man rumble away into the tunnel and felt the cold breath of the place beat up against her face. Then she restored the barrier, made the hole fast, locked the cellar door and returned to her daughter.

"Now we can go to bed and sleep in peace," said Mrs. Bellhanger. "We shan't hear no more to trouble us till tomorrow."

"Has there been time for Richard?" asked Phyllis when the maid had departed.

"Plenty, I reckon. He's out at the other end and away by now," replied her mother.

Meanwhile, the police proceeded on their way, but found nothing to challenge them. The tunnel was empty, the chamber into which it opened yawned black and deserted. Once more Bowden climbed the steps, proceeded by the winding passage through the thickness of the walls, groaned as he hit a shin or knocked an elbow, relieved his feelings by using hard words to Webster and threatened to send in his own resigna-

tion on the morrow. To the hole in the chimney they came at last. A permanent ladder stood there now and Samuel was soon in the echoing chambers of the Storehouse. Then came a clue to the runaway, and, in the light of Webster's torch, upon the floor of the sail-room, lay a man's cap. It was of rough tweed cloth and Bowden recognised it for Dick's.

"Just as I thought," he said. "All's clear as mud now. He bolted this way, but where he went the Lord knows."

"And the vet. knows," suggested Webster. "It's a frame-up between them. So like as not you'll find neither one nor t'other tomorrow."

"Damn the pair of them," answered Bowden; and that he could swear testified to his unusual irritation. They emerged to find their companion waiting outside the steps that descended to the fore-court. He had perambulated the Storehouse twice but seen nobody.

"He was out and off hours before you got here, while you were cooling your heels outside Monks," declared the Inspector. "Now you two can knock up 'The Blue Peter' and see Saul Baggs, and satisfy yourselves that Rivers hasn't been back and stop with him if he's there; and I'll go to Patrick Rivers', though it's little likely I shall find him."

He was mistaken, however, for when he banged without ceremony on the veterinary surgeon's door and pressed the electric bell, also, Mr. Rivers opened his bedroom window and looked out.

"Who's that?" he asked mildly, but knew well enough as he did so.

"It's Bowden," answered the Inspector.

"You'll catch your death one of these nights," replied the other. "I thought you weren't going to do no more till tomorrow. So Forbes said."

"It isn't for Forbes to give his orders to me. I want you down the house, please, and the quicker the better."

"To think that you should ever talk to me in that tone of voice," answered Patrick. "And you wouldn't if you didn't know to the bottom of your boots you were in the wrong. It's all a punishment for your treachery, Samuel."

"Come down! I order you in the name of the Law!"

"I'm coming, I'm coming. I suppose the Law will let me get into my trousers," snapped the other, quick to take Bowden's tone.

He disappeared, donned his clothes and then, descending, admitted his old friend.

Under the gas light Inspector Bowden appeared very dusty, bedraggled and annoyed.

"What have you been up to now then?" asked Rivers without friendship.

"It's what you've been up to? Where's Richard Rivers?"

Patrick showed mild triumph.

"You've come up here to ask me that?"

"Yes, I have."

"And thought I'd tell you?"

"I thought you were an honest man."

"You thought right, I believe. If not, you're

the first man who ever thought different. And I thought you were; but it's no job for honest men to hound down others they well know to be as honest as themselves. And I'll always help an honest man against the rogue lawyers and you slaves of the Police they set to work for them."

"Then it comes to this. You've helped your nephew to defy the Law?"

"What it comes to we have yet to see. And you needn't think to bully me, because it can't be done. I don't know where my nephew is, and I don't lift a finger to help you find him. You can't prove that I've helped him to do anything, and I'm not going to tell you, or anybody, whether I did or did not. But this I'll tell you: I'm mighty glad he's tumbled to what was doing, and I'm mighty sure that not all your thick-headed sort put together will find him. Anybody can escape from you."

With admirable self-control, the inspector ignored this insult.

"You know where he is, Patrick Rivers?"

"I do not."

"You could very soon lay your hands on him if you pleased—I'll warrant that."

"It's for you to lay your hands on him. I'm giving nothing away to you, Samuel, since you've turned against him, knowing right well he's innocent. You find out the truth of these murders and then maybe I'll help you to find Richard—not for your own sake now, but his own. Then we'll see if I can find him, or if I can't."

Bowden glowered at the other.

"Well, we'll hear what the lawyers have got to say to you tomorrow," he growled, rising to go.

"So we will then. And we'll also hear if my word isn't as good as theirs; and if there's no more you want to know, you'd best be gone and let me go back to bed. You've hurt me a cruel lot over this job and made me lose my temper for one thing—a painful experience to the like of me."

"And what about me?" asked the other. "D'you think I'm enjoying myself with the eyes of the world on West Haven and every newspaper on God's earth laughing at the police and telling 'em their business. You don't, or won't, understand I'm doing my duty. Why, even that rebellious woman up the hill—Mary Bellhanger, who is in this, too, I'll swear—even she didn't hesitate to say I was doing my duty."

"As you see it, no doubt, Samuel. But what's the use of us arguing? If your duty is to catch Richard, set about it and catch him. I'm saying nothing about that. And if my duty—knowing him an innocent man—is to help the innocent to keep his freedom, why do you rage against me because I would do it? Yes, I would do it every time; and if I get the chance I will do it. So we'd best to differ and not fall out."

"What about my reputation?"

Patrick grunted.

"That's your job, Sam. You find the chap that did in my poor brother and grasp hold of the fact that the family of Rivers don't kill their own fathers. Will you have a spot of whiskey?"

"No, I will not," answered Bowden. "I'll never

'drink with you again till we've got to the bottom of this business and you've apologised for saying I'm a thick-headed fool that never catch nobody. I'll not forget that, nor yet forgive it.'

"Good-night, then. And tell your wife to look after that cough, else you'll be in the doctor's hands and your great usefulness spoiled."

"A lot you care what happens to me," answered the other; and then he left the house and returned to the police station.

Webster awaited him.

"Richard Rivers hasn't been home tonight, Inspector," he said. "We went up to his bedroom with Saul Baggs. Saul knows nothing, or says he don't. But there's a good few round about who would help Dick if they thought he was in a mess."

The morning, however, brought some light on Richard's disappearance, for Ernest Norman was at the police station at an early hour, and Walpole, in charge at the time, learned that the fisherman's small sailing-boat had disappeared. Ernest suspected robbery.

"That ketch from Brittany went out on the tide," he explained in his hollow voice. "And while she was at the wharf loading sand I often see them foreign boys poking about on the beach. I figure it like this. Before she sailed on the tide last night, one of them rascals was waiting and rowed out to her in my boat and took it along."

An hour afterwards both Bowden and Forbes heard the story, and during the forenoon a keen

search up and down the coast produced no news of the boat. The telephone to Weymouth had sent a launch after the French ketch, and Forbes doubted not that the run-away would be arrested before nightfall; but at dusk upon this day there came news which disappointed most of those concerned. The ketch had been found without difficulty making very slow progress. But there was nobody on board save the master, two men and a boy. They had their own boat only on deck, and declared themselves as wholly ignorant of any particulars concerning a stolen boat, or a young man running from the police. The little vessel was searched from stem to stern and proved to contain no hidden passenger.

After his disappearance public opinion rather tended against Richard Rivers. The people were astonished to hear him suspected, but still more surprised to hear that he had fled on the threat of arrest. False and exaggerated rumours filled the air of West Haven and the Bellhangers were bombarded for information, while every man he met buttonholed Mr. Rivers. All concerned declined to furnish any information and the veterinary surgeon was glad that his business took him far afield and out of the circle of his neighbours until nightfall. On returning from Millchester by an evening train, he learned that neither Forbes nor the police had sought him. He himself desired to see Martin Forbes, but was too weary to do so until the following day. The discovery, or clue, of which he had hinted to Bowden did not occupy him that night. He dismissed all thoughts of

the business in profound sleep. Inspector Bowden also found himself worn out and much indisposed when another morning came; but business demanded his attention throughout that day and he spent most of his time at the office telephone. Having learned that the ketch did not contain Richard, and that the missing boat was unreported by the coast guard watchers, who had been ordered to keep a lookout for it, he had issued directions for the employment of "wireless" to the Channel traffic in general and still believed that, within another twenty-four hours, the capture of Richard Rivers might be reported. Forbes, who came to see him in the evening, had ransacked the Storehouse once again during the morning and, after his dinner, proceeded to the office of the lawyers in Bridegate, that he might gather particulars concerning the will of George Rivers; but a day's delay had occurred owing to the absence of Mr. Secretan.

The Inspector pointed to Richard's flight as a serious evidence of guilty knowledge if no worse; while Martin Forbes, though disappointed that the man had fled, still found himself convinced that young Rivers was not guiltily involved, but felt puzzled to understand why Richard had taken this foolish step.

"I read it this way," he said. "There's no doubt that Richard went through the Storehouse to give the plain-clothes chap the slip. You found his cap, and it looks clear enough that he picked up the boat and put to sea. But it was all a panic flight in my opinion. He found out suddenly that

he was being shadowed. Or rather Phyllis Bellhanger found it out and told him. He'd not have spotted it himself probably, being an unsuspicious bird and still hardly realising that a net was weaving round him. He was shocked for a minute at the inquest. Then, finding other people began to believe what seemed such a mad idea to him, he lost his nerve, thought of the tunnel and bolted that way with the help of the women, who fastened up after him. Patrick Rivers was at Monks, as we know; but we can't say if he had any hand in Dick's plans. We only know the vet. doesn't believe him guilty and would stick at nothing for him. But what puzzles me comes after. Where is Richard now? If he'd come ashore, the boat would have been picked up and reported. He set out somewhere after midnight, according to your calculations, and between seven and half past, next morning, the loss of the boat was known. There was a mild off-shore wind, so he couldn't have gone particular far in a boat with small winter canvas, and the hue and cry had run along the coast for him an hour after you heard about it. I don't think the ketch had anything to do with it, and if he came ashore, the boat ought to have turned up. She hasn't. Therefore I judge he made for the open Channel, thinking to get picked up by a passing steamer. If so, we should hear an answer to 'wireless' not later than tomorrow."

"If he went out to sea and he's not been picked up, he'll be drowned," said Bowden. "There's half a gale sprung up since yesterday morning and a big sea running in the Channel. And why you

doubt that Patrick Rivers had a hand in it I should like to know?"

"I doubt it, because I'm not sure he'd have thought that the wisest thing for his nephew to do. I reckon the discovery, that he was under suspicion, frightened Dick off his head. But his uncle already knew he was under suspicion. Patrick Rivers might have thought it was a good idea for Dick to make himself scarce till we knew more, or perhaps had convinced ourselves there was no case against him. But this idea of taking to the sea wasn't a very smart one. Rivers, as I say, wouldn't stick at anything where the boy was concerned. He knows as I do, and as you do at bottom, that a man with the record and mental make-up of young Rivers hadn't any truck with these things. He's said openly to more than one that he'd help Richard if need be and take the consequences. But I judge that he'd have given different advice—and better, if he'd been asked. There were a hundred ways in which the lad could have vanished that night after he left the Storehouse, and a boat was about the worst."

"All the same he'd done the trick, boat or no boat, and Patrick's behind him."

"He may be. You can't prove it."

"No; but the very fact that he won't say 'yes' or 'no' does prove it to my mind. Same with those women. They won't confess, but of course we have proof positive they helped, because the hole in the cellar was all shut up and right and regular when I went down night before last."

"You can't make them speak if they won't."

“No, I can’t. A woman mostly speaks when you don’t want her to, not when you do. But the Law ought to be able to make them speak. What about the will? Mr. Secretan showed you that?”

“Oh, yes. He made no difficulty now the death of George Rivers is certain. It’s a curious will in a way, but no use to us—for a reason. Under his will the innkeeper leaves half his fortune to his brother, Patrick, and the other half in his brother’s keeping till Richard is thirty years old. When his son has reached the age of thirty, Patrick is to decide whether the money can be handed over; and he’s only to hand it over if Richard is leading a satisfactory life in every way and earning his living and enjoying a good reputation. The dead man didn’t trust his son, or believe in him, so he left his future in the hands of his uncle, whom he knew to be a fair and honest person friendly disposed to Dick. When Patrick died, his money was to go back to Richard, if Richard was all right and justifying his existence. If not, it was to be left to charities. Now I don’t doubt that George Rivers made a very just and reasonable will from his point of view, but the only thing that interested me was whether anybody but Mr. Secretan knew the contents of it. Richard certainly did not. We may take that for granted. But whether his uncle knew, we cannot say. Mr. Secretan is practically positive he didn’t. He said that George Rivers was the last man in the world to whisper a word about his will to anybody. What I’ve been wanting to know was whether the contents of the will would throw any light on the

death of George Rivers and help us to find anybody vitally interested in doing away with him. But you see it does not. There's every reason to suppose Patrick, who is most interested, didn't know the contents; but assuming he did, then we've got to ask ourselves if it is possible for him to have had any hand in the crimes at the Storehouse."

Samuel Bowden shook his head.

"Him and me are out since he's withstood me and insulted me and tried to tie the hands of the Law," he said. "I'm feeling none too kindly to the man at present and find myself a good bit disappointed with him; but, even so, I need not withhold an opinion, or regard myself as prejudiced against him, and therefore not a fair witness to character. Probably, if you looked into it, you'd find he could prove an alibi every time, which his nephew cannot; but, in any case, I've known the man for very near forty years and been a close friend. I don't suppose for a minute that George Rivers ever told a word about his will to Patrick; but if Patrick had known what fine things George had done for him, it's contrary to human nature, let alone his character, to have paid George by murdering him."

"A very reasonable argument," answered Forbes. "I'm going to think it out, which I haven't had time yet to do. And probably I shall soon run up against a snag. You see, since these things happened, we've rather left my old partner out of our calculations. How do we fit him in? Does the discovery that George Rivers is dead

help us a step to understanding the disappearance of Raleigh Prescott?"

"I haven't thought of poor Prescott for a week," answered the Inspector.

"Nobody has but me. Yet with him, I daresay, lies the link. If we knew where Raleigh was, we might find the keystone of the arch, Bowden."

"You still reckon he's dead?"

"Yes, I believe he's dead; and I believe he's in the Storehouse."

"I wish it was true the cursed place was going to be pulled down."

"It may come true. This mystery has created an interest in the papers I hardly remember equalled. Government may decide to pull it down."

"Never," declared Samuel. "Government's got no money for adventures like that."

"Our member of Parliament's trying for it. The job would furnish a useful bit of work for a couple of hundred unemployed."

They parted, and, to their surprise, the following morning brought no news of Richard Rivers. Neither was Ernest Norman's boat reported.

Bowden said a grim word to his old friend on the subject during the course of the day, for at noon the funeral of George Rivers brought immense throngs of morbid sight-seers to West Haven, and the Inspector, with half a dozen policemen, preserved order and decency in the burying-ground. There came Patrick Rivers, as chief mourner, and his sister, Mrs. Sarah Jane Pridham, from Yeovil, who walked beside him. She was a woman of keen intellect and had followed

every incident in her brother's disappearance and tragic end. She was, moreover, quite of Patrick's mind in the matter of their nephew and scorned those who could, for one instant, imagine the young man involved.

The brother and sister were followed by representatives of certain organisations in which the dead publican had taken interest. There came, also, the staff of "The Blue Peter" and various friends and acquaintances desirous to pay George Rivers a last mark of respect. With a kindly gesture, whose significance was not lost, Mrs. Bellhanger attended the funeral, also, that all interested might know she no longer associated the dead and her own bereavement. Phyllis came with her, and when all was over, Mrs. Pridham walked beside Phyllis and her mother and shrilly protested at the circumstances which had prevented Richard from doing honour to his father's dust.

"A pack of fools," she said, "and God will show them their folly before they're much older. My nephew, Richard, could no more have done this than I could myself, and it's a terrible thing that those appointed to control us and make good our laws should have such little knowledge of human nature."

Patrick Rivers was gloomy, and not only the melancholy rite, but his own thoughts, weighed heavily upon him. He kept them to himself, however, took his place by the grave, looked down upon the coffin-lid when the service was over, after the accepted ritual, and presently conveyed his sister back to the funeral coach.

At the gate of the churchyard he came face to face with Samuel Bowden and spoke to him.

"Your work," he said, "your work, that this man's son wasn't by his father's coffin today, where he should have been."

The other was hot and weary. The crowd had taxed his energy and his patience. He scowled upon his old friend and answered harshly.

"That's a lie, Rivers. It's his own work, not mine. Why did he go if he wasn't afraid to stop? And, anyway, it's your work that he's drowned, for drowned he is in my opinion; and if you hadn't helped him to do a rash and foolish and wicked thing, he might have been here today."

"Remember that speech," answered the other, his mild eyes flashing for once. "Don't forget those words, Samuel, till the time comes for you to be ashamed that you could speak them."

They parted and the crowds dissolved. Mrs. Pridham invited Mrs. Bellhanger and her daughter to a funeral banquet that had been prepared at "The Blue Peter," but they declined the compliment and returned home. The ceremony had depressed Mary, and the sufferings of Phyllis during these days made her very anxious. The doubt and mystery now hanging over the fate of Richard had reduced his sweetheart to a state of tension and nervous excitation which Mary was powerless to soothe. She, too, suffered acutely. The truth had been hidden from her by Richard's uncle—for sound motives, as she believed; but in the face of the rumours and opinions that now circulated to explain Dick's continued disappearance, she

longed for her own sake and her daughter's to know more. For the last day or two, however, Patrick had purposely avoided her, though he wrote a brief letter explaining why he took this course. He believed himself to be now shadowed by the police and suspected that they were trying to find, through some act of his, the whereabouts of the run-away. He urged Mrs. Bellhanger to do nothing that might challenge suspicion, and he hoped that when the inquest was resumed in two days' time, possible light might dawn. His own clue, however, he confessed, had failed him, and his belief that Richard might speedily and safely return grew fainter. Concerning Richard himself he said nothing, and Mary read a note of dejection and disappointment in the letter; while Phyllis, every sense now quickened, found in it only cause for increased anxiety.

On the night after the funeral the girl was strangely restless and she puzzled her mother by a fit of weeping. Phyllis seldom shed tears, but tonight they overwhelmed her, and Mary, determining to call for Dr. Colfax in the morning, prevailed with the girl to go to bed. She obeyed, but did not sleep and when the house was silent and her weary mother unconscious in the room next her own, Phyllis woke into a strange activity, became sensible of some strange and resistless impulse, heard, as it seemed, a voice speaking to her, felt that some invisible messenger commanded her attention and obedience. She was not frightened. Her mind grew calm, alert, watchful. A sensation as of being directed by unseen wills and

guided by unseen hands awoke vividly in Phyllis. "Something's calling me!" she said to herself. The fret and fever of the last few days, the sense of danger, the dread certainty of loss—these lifted from her soul. She found herself sitting up in bed listening with nerves steady and emotions keen but controlled. Her extraordinary clearness of brain impressed her. This was no dream, or self-hypnosis. She had never been so wide awake before in her life. Something almost akin to happiness touched her heart. The impression that she was in the presence of some benignant and kindly influence heartened her and urged her to action, robbed her of fear, fortified her young soul.

The message brought her out of bed and she followed her instructions step by step, never wondering, never doubting. She rose, dressed herself, put on a thick walking jacket and descended to the kitchen. Each order as it flashed upon consciousness was complete in itself. She fully understood it, but did not look ahead, or wonder what her next action would be. When she reached the kitchen she knew not what awaited her, but there her hands kindled a lamp and then sought a candle and a box of matches. She remembered afterwards that the clock struck one as she heard the next direction. She descended to the cellar of Monks, set the lamp upon a trestle there and opened the entrance into the tunnel. While doing so she knew not at all what was to follow. The message did not tell her whether her task was now accomplished; whether she opened the tunnel

for herself, or another; but the thing that most impressed her was her own lack of fear. She proceeded calmly without a throb of alarm, without any tremor of dread. Cheerfully, meticulously, she obeyed the next prompting from the unseen monitor, who appeared to stand almost tangible, but invisible, at her side.

She was directed to light her candle and enter the tunnel, and she did so, proceeding into the musty darkness with steady foot and heart. But every sense was alert, and a wave of satisfaction and content rose strongly within her. Down the narrow way she went, nor found it perilous. Her light illuminated the dry built walls, piled shoulder high to right and left, and sometimes set glimmering a stalactite or rocky projection in the low roof above her. The dead silence and loneliness did not depress her. She was only conscious that Richard had trodden the same path not many days before and that her unknown guide was thinking of him.

She emerged into the chamber at the tunnel's mouth and saw the steps beyond. Then, standing silent awaiting further direction, there came, as it seemed, the murmur of a human voice. Whence the sound reached her and whether it was real, or woven of her imagination, she could not tell. Only a very few words could she distinguish, but they were tremendous words; and it was the anguished voice of her lover that appeared to cry them. She had never heard any such tones before, yet knew that Richard spoke; but where he might

be—whether alive or dead, whether close at hand or far away, she could not tell.

Out of the sudden sound, punctuating its hollow murmur, articulation dawned and wild words were shrieked rather than spoken. They were few in number, but distinct.

“Tell me, Raleigh Prescott—tell me—open your mouth—speak! What hell of the damned is this? Oh, my God, finish it and let me out! Phyllis—Phyllis!”

The voice sank into a moaning and then was silent; the listener waited, every nerve on edge, to hear more. But though she stood motionless and steady in the great darkness of the vault, where her candle made but one spark of light upon that far-flung gloom, she heard no other sound. Through the dead silence presently came water dripping and she felt a cold touch on her hand and saw that it descended from above. But whence the voice had reached her—whether from above or below, whether in imagination or reality, she could not tell.

She lifted her own voice, cried, “Dick! Dick!”, and the sound reverberated about her and faded slowly. But her own voice alarmed Phyllis and a strange and complete change and reversal overtook her mood. Until now she had not felt alone. The invisible, ineluctable sentinel and guide had suddenly forsaken her. She knew that he was gone; she felt that he would not return. Her courage vanished and a thousand terrors began to circle about her in the darkness. She woke, as it

seemed, from sleep. It was the unreal domain of dreams that had made her brave; it was the departed shadow and support that had tempted her to face the unknown dread of the Storehouse by night. Now, alive to her situation, roused to reality by her own voice, deserted, her limbs trembled and she came near to fainting. It was as though a somnambulist had suddenly awakened, to find herself on the brink of infinite peril from which no escape was possible. So have many awakened from sleep, to plunge instantly into eternal sleep. Everything was unreal but the cavern in which she stood, the steps that ascended from it and the tunnel that gaped behind her. The words that she had heard, the melancholy moan that followed them, her present situation—all seemed the weird matter of a dream. But she slept no more. Fear first froze her, then a frantic yearning to return to safety. A sense of near and tremendous danger knit her up and a certainty that she could serve no interest by remaining here. Already the voice seemed a thing remote, echoing out of a far past; for time kept no tryst in this dark hole of vanished men. Day and night were alike in these vaults. The hot wax dropping on her hand roused Phyllis. She dared not turn her back upon the shadows that came and went as the candle flickered, but she retreated to the shelter of the tunnel backwards, listened once again to see if any sound broke the dead silence and then turned and made the best speed possible through the subterranean way that led back to her home. The sense of loneliness and fear persisted until she had returned;

but then, her own danger over and the timbers set in place, the immediate past swept her mind and the recollection of setting forth so bravely, the journey under invisible guidance, the sudden, horror-stricken sense of being deserted after that faint and terrible cry had stolen out upon the stillness—all returned vividly to her recollection.

She came now to her mother, awakened her and related every incident of the adventure. She forgot no detail and when she had finished, Mary made an instant response. But it was not the reply that Phyllis expected. She had supposed and, indeed, hoped that Mrs. Bellhanger would declare the summons, her reaction to it and the ultimate experience and return, all parts of some half-waking nightmare occasioned by her own misery and distress; but her mother viewed the matter otherwise. She did not immediately reply when the girl had finished speaking. Then she released herself from the arms of Phyllis, rose and began quickly to dress.

“There’s more in this than you know, or I,” she said quietly. “Go down now and brisk up the fire and make some strong tea. That’s the best thing you can take, I reckon. Then we’ll go straight up to Patrick Rivers. He must be told about this instantly. We’ve no right to wait an hour. If what you’ve been through was a dream, no harm is done by waking the man; if it was truth, then the morning may be too late and he must act the first moment he can.”

In half an hour the women trudged through the night together.

CHAPTER XIV

ONCE more the uncle of Richard Rivers found himself awakened from his slumber, though this was no new experience. His business demanded many sudden calls at any hour when lives of valuable beasts were threatened. He had earned great fame for understanding of cats and birds, also, and could remember being called out on a frosty February night to go ten miles and attend a Brazilian parrot. On these exceptional occasions he charged somewhat stiffly and none questioned his right to do so.

Now came Mary and Phyllis Bellhanger with their story and he was able swiftly to allay their fears.

He heard them with deepest interest, but, as he explained, it was the adventure of Phyllis, rather than any bearing that it had upon her lover, which challenged Richard's uncle.

"A most extraordinary thing," he said, "for I'm a good deal put about on Dick's account myself; but I have sound reasons for my trouble and I was hiding them. Anxiety takes a terrible grip of the nerves sometimes and drives the mind into all manner of fantastic imaginings. I've been suffering from bad dreams, too, and seeing what you tell me, I'd better make a clean breast of what really did happen. But I'd rather not have told

you women, for the reason you could honestly go on saying you knew nothing."

"Is he there—in the Store—or isn't he?" asked Mary. "That's the point for the minute. Did Phyllis hear him shout out?"

"I wish she had," answered Mr. Rivers. "No—it was just one of those queer storms in the mind that woke her up and drove her down the tunnel; and then—strung up and excited—she fancied she heard his voice. The strangest thing to me is that the name of Raleigh Prescott should have come into her head. That beats me altogether. But, while I wish Dick was there and within reach of his friends, yet I very well know he can't be, so you needn't fret as to that. I saw him away from the Storehouse myself, and I'll tell you what did happen."

"Where is he now, Mr. Rivers?" asked Phyllis. "It's a godsend to know I didn't hear him. And yet I was wide awake and it seemed awful real."

"Where Richard ought to be, I can tell you," he answered, "but exactly where he is I can't be sure, because there's one thing that should be known by me long before now and is not. Dick did exactly as I advised him until I left him, and I've no doubt at all he carried out the whole plan to the best of his ability. The plot was to slip through the Storehouse to begin with, so that he'd have no eyes upon him. That he did. I met him there with a bag, that contained one square meal and a few odds and ends. I'd remembered everything, money included, and gave him thirty pounds for his needs. Then, all being clear, we went to

the beach and picked up Norman's little sailing boat. The tide was just on the turn and we launched her in two minutes. Dick knows how to handle a boat as well as the best, so I knew he was safe enough in that light off-shore wind. And what he'd got to do was this. He was going to sail east and make Chesil Beach before daylight. There he'd land, leave the boat and get across on his feet to Weymouth. I'd figured the times and knew he might be in Weymouth with any luck by early morning. From Weymouth he was going to take the Channel Island steamer next night. She generally sails round about midnight, and once he was in Guernsey under a false name, I judged he'd be safe enough till I could telegraph."

"What's troubled you, then? If he hadn't brought it off, he'd have been caught surely. Since he hasn't been heard of, why shouldn't we be satisfied he got there all right?"

"He may have and I'm hoping he did. But what frets me is the boat. According to my calculations the boat should have been reported the next day. On the one hand we've got the certainty of a pretty smooth sea all that night, yet, on the other, we know the boat didn't land on Chesil Beach. He may have found he'd made such good way that he could carry on till he was under the Bill somewhere. Perhaps he got ashore there and left the boat where none would look for it or expect it. If he did, the storm since may have broke her up. I'm going away tomorrow, out of my usual beats to where I'm not known, to send another telegram to Guernsey."

“To him?”

“Yes, under his false name. I’ve sent one already, but didn’t get a reply. It was planned that I addressed him at the post-office, and he’d call daily on the chance of news. I’ve got a false name, too, you see, so he could reply to the post-office I wire from. I might run up to Salisbury in the car—that’s outside my rounds.”

“And wait till you get something back?”

“Yes—wait till I hear just a word that all’s well.”

“And if they haven’t seen him at the post-office, then all won’t be well with him,” said Mrs. Bellhanger.

“I’ll wire the post-office, too, this time, and if I don’t hear and they don’t report him, then something has happened to change his plans, no doubt.”

“You’ll try and find out something tomorrow, Mr. Rivers,” began Phyllis.

“I will, my dear. I’m very wishful to know, and, as I tell you, not too satisfied about it. I’ll get away tomorrow in the car. I may tell you they are shadowing me now, because that traitor, Samuel Bowden, is an enemy and eager to see if I’m in touch with Richard. He knows well enough I’m in it. But they won’t arrest me. The game is to watch me, thinking that if they do I shall lead them to the boy. So they’ll let me run free, no doubt. I’ll slip them tomorrow, however, and if I don’t—if I find there’s another car behind me, or anything like that—then I must trust my wits. It’s no good telegraphing to Richard if they can

prove I've done so. If I'm back in time, I'll come over tomorrow night. It won't be till after ten o'clock, or maybe later."

They talked until it was daylight, and a listener might have observed that Phyllis was now the most sanguine of the three. The relief from her terrible tension created a rebound of spirits, and the fact that her lover was not in the Storehouse made any lesser peril small by comparison. She felt a growing consciousness that all was well with Richard and the reaction made her almost happy. It was evident, however, that neither her mother nor Patrick Rivers shared her sense of security. Mrs. Bellhanger fell very silent as the first chill grey of a winter dawn began to strive with the gas light under which they sat; and Richard's uncle, while trying to put a sanguine face upon the situation, was clearly ill at ease.

"You'd better get back before the place is awake," he said. "I shall be away in an hour or two. I hope I may have a bit of news by tonight. I'm disappointed for the minute in another direction, also, because I thought I'd got something for Forbes that might have proved amazing useful. It promised well, but it's come to nothing. We can only be patient and trust the Lord to right these wrongs. He may sooner than we think for."

They left him then and returned home, Phyllis still sanguine of the future. She declared a sense of peace and thankfulness that her horrible experience had been of the mind alone; but her mother

listened without many words. Indeed, her thoughts had drifted elsewhere and she scarcely heard the girl.

At home again, Mrs. Bellhanger found herself much desiring to be alone. She was out of tune with Phyllis and the younger's happiness jarred upon her, for she discovered an instinct in her own heart which declared it to be illusory. She felt surprise that her daughter could thus pass so swiftly from the depth of grief to an altitude of hope. She suspected that both standpoints were equally faulty, but she found her own instincts very darkly coloured. A sense of supreme, imminent disaster hung heavily over the woman's head that day and she experienced a growing need for more counsel and another opinion on the events of the last few hours.

She conceived it as possible that, once he had set out and his uncle was gone, Dick changed his mind and returned to the Storehouse. He might have suddenly seen the danger of attempting to reach the Channel Islands, or felt that he would be safer in some secret place known to himself and no other. An accident might have immured him. There was the appeal to Raleigh Prescott, also. It seemed hard to believe that any emotional complex, or hallucination, would have sounded the vanished detective's name in the ears of Phyllis, for he might well have been the last person in her thoughts. For a considerable time Mrs. Bellhanger puzzled over the psychological problem, and the more she reflected, the less she

was able to accept the situation. At noon she sent the maid out upon an errand and herself descended the tunnel with Phyllis for guide. They proceeded as far as the vault and there listened in silence for half an hour. But no whisper rewarded them and Phyllis would not let her mother stay longer, for the place, though not as cold as the winter air without, struck mouldy and foul.

The experiment served still further to content the girl, and her sole interest was now centred upon Mr. Rivers and his operations at Salisbury or elsewhere; but her mother continued unconvinced and full of unrestful monitions. Later in the day, when their dinner had been eaten and Phyllis, restless and unable to remain about any task, set off to Bridegate, Mary dressed and determined to seek advice in another quarter. Choice seemed to lie between Martin Forbes and Inspector Bowden; but knowing the former to entertain little doubt of Richard's probity, despite his flight, she sought him and found him at "The Blue Peter." He was preparing to leave West Haven.

Mrs. Bellhanger, feeling the private detective to be on her side, hesitated not to tell a plain and full tale, leaving out nothing and narrating in every detail all that she had that morning learned from Phyllis and afterwards from Dick's uncle. Not, indeed, till she had left Forbes did Mary trouble to ask herself whether Mr. Rivers had spoken in confidence. Her listener showed very deep interest, and from his silences it seemed to Mrs. Bellhanger that her information roused vari-

ous trains of thought in the mind of the man, which he pursued before uttering any comment whatever upon the things she told him. How much in exchange he revealed of his own secret thoughts, Mrs. Bellhanger could not determine, but his first words appeared to belie the obvious interest her narrative had awakened. He was very cautious, and she felt that, for the present at any rate, Forbes had no desire to retail the real effect upon his mind of what he had learned. He asked for exact particulars of what had happened on the night of Richard's flight, learned them, and then proceeded.

"We can dismiss the imaginary voice, Mrs. Bellhanger," he began. "It was natural enough that your daughter, after all she's suffered and is still suffering, should get a bit light-headed, and the 'call,' as she describes it, and the adventure in the tunnel and the mention of poor Prescott's name, as she supposed on her lover's lips, all show a natural, mental confusion. Her brain was half dreaming and half awake, and so you get this muddle of reality and delusion. But I'm glad it happened, because it took you to the vet., and what he told you interests me not a little. He might have confided in me, for he knows I'm on Richard's side. I wish Dick hadn't run away, yet I can see his uncle's argument. If he had stopped, he would certainly have been locked up, and failing any nearer approach to the truth, they would have tried him on the capital charge, very likely. They could hardly have convicted him, in my opinion, but—— However, he's either now in

Guernsey or somewhere else, and the fact of the boat not turning up, after what you tell me, is rather serious. When does Mr. Rivers come up to you tonight?"

"He'll be up after ten, if he can come."

"He may have more difficulty in getting through than he imagines. He's being watched and it's too late to tell them to let him telegraph and think they don't know it. They may do so, however. I'll come up in the course of the evening. I'd meant to go tomorrow morning and look after some other matters that want me, till Dick was found. But this is important. Expect me after dark. I must see Mr. Rivers, of course."

She left him then, dimly conscious that he had talked for the sake of talking and not revealed the true opinions or intentions awakened by her information. It surprised her that Forbes, as Mr. Rivers had done before him, attached so little significance to the strange adventure of Phyllis. They did not know the girl as she did; but Mrs. Bellhanger was unprepared, though both men agreed in slighting the story, to share their belief that it demanded no serious consideration. Phyllis had never been a girl to dream, or to fancy voices where none existed. Even in her distress she continued to be herself, and Mary felt puzzled to understand why an incident that seemed so tremendous to her, should weigh so little with these two capable men. Second thoughts, however, served to explain the mystery, for, since Richard was known to have left the Storehouse and gone to sea, he could not have been there when his

sweetheart imagined that she heard him—unless he had returned in secret and kept his uncle ignorant of the fact.

Had Mary been able to dip into the mind of Martin Forbes, however, she would have learned no little to surprise her, for it was just that part of her narrative that he had pretended to dismiss as of no account which interested him most profoundly. Forbes could not define his own impressions, but they pointed the way to instant action by a personal accident of character. He was a rationalist and distrusted psychological explanations when common sense could supply an answer to any problem. But common sense could supply no answer to this, or explain his vanished partner's name in the ear of Phyllis. Thus the girl's experience interested him more than the particulars that Mrs. Bellhanger supplied concerning her visit to Patrick Rivers, or the method furnished by his uncle for the young man's escape. The latter were commonplace, the former extremely difficult to rationalize. What drew Phyllis down the tunnel—what impulse brought her into so strange an adventure—he could not pretend to guess, but he found himself inspired by a growing inclination to believe that the reported words had reached her mind by normal channels. If she had heard them in truth, it did not follow that Mr. Rivers had lied, for Dick might have returned without his knowledge and fallen into some disastrous trap for which only accident was responsible. Thus he reflected, just as Mrs. Bellhanger had reflected before him; but since there was a real possibility

that Richard might be there, Forbes could not dismiss the subject as of no account. The fact that the voice had called upon the name of Raleigh Prescott and addressed him as though present also and sharing Dick's horrible plight, lent a very urgent incentive to the mind of Forbes. He built a case and imagined a situation that might embrace both men. Was it not possible that some unforeseen catastrophe, in which no human hand had taken any part, was responsible for the disappearance of his friend; while Richard Rivers, returning in secret to hide near his home, had fallen into the same disaster and was even now side by side with the earlier victim? That Prescott was dead Martin Forbes had long ago determined. More than a fortnight had passed since his disappearance; but if Phyllis did in truth hear the cry of Rivers, then, surely, Prescott still lived and an effort must be made on his behalf. Search would be restricted and whether he survived or had succumbed to injuries, his discovery might help the general problem. He did not hesitate to seek the runaway for his own sake, but a larger hope reawakened that more than the salvation of young Rivers might reward a further search. For his companions he decided on Inspector Bowden and the constable, Walpole, a man of proved courage and great physical strength; and seeing that Mr. Rivers had promised to visit Monks after ten o'clock, Forbes planned his new inquiry to take place at an earlier hour. He would wait only until dark and then descend the tunnel—the entrance least calculated to challenge attention.

Bowden willingly enough agreed to the proposal and heard the story with very deep interest. He did not suppose that Phyllis had listened to any real voice; but he agreed to be at Monks soon after six o'clock.

"The only thing we can do by way of search is to pull down the dry built walls," he said. "That's all there is to it. They go down each side of the tunnel and surround the vault at the end. They are piled of loose stones and it's easy to look behind 'em if we fetch off a foot along the top. But that's not exactly work for us, so I'll bring a couple of hefty men with me."

"If she did really hear a voice, and, seeing the extraordinary nature of the words, I think, more and more, she did, then the man who spoke must have been very near," explained Martin Forbes. "The field of search is small. I pressed her to indicate the direction from which she appeared to hear Richard Rivers speaking, but she could not, and in that echoing place, shut in above and below and on every side, it is not surprising she doesn't know. But we can pull down the walls easily enough and if there is anything or anybody concealed behind, we must find them."

Four men arrived at Monks after dark and all brought electric torches with them. Forbes had not arrived, and when he did so, he found Inspector Bowden expressing his sincere regret that Mrs. Bellhanger had consulted the veterinary surgeon rather than himself.

"You see it all comes back to the Law," he said. "You may run away from us, but when

you're in trouble you very soon call upon us to help you."

Ten minutes later, the hour then being seven o'clock, Forbes and Bowden, with Webster, Walpole and a third constable, proceeded down the tunnel. The inspector had directed every step to be taken in silence, that no faintest sound of a voice should be missed; and the precaution proved wise, for more than a voice awaited them, and suddenly, without one warning of what was to come, the men were face to face with the truth. They slowed their feet as they reached the outlet of the tunnel, and, to his amazement, Forbes, who walked first, at a distance of some yards ahead of his companions, perceived, before he reached it, that the vault was fitfully illuminated. A light flickered there, descending in a beam from above, and then came the sound of quick feet. The detective drew up until Bowden reached him. The police were directed to stop out of sight within the black mouth of the tunnel, while just in front of them Bowden and Forbes stood unseen. They saw a human figure come down the steps and turn to the wall that ran round the chamber. They had time only to mark the blur of a face, then it was turned from them, while the figure set its lamp upon the floor of the vault and began to pull down the stones of the wall with great activity.

"At last!" said Forbes, but Bowden did not answer. He was staring at the unknown man, whose shadow, thrown up from the lamp, danced hugely against the side of the chamber as he heaved down the stones and rose and bent. He

worked with great speed and they could hear him panting as he did so. An aperture soon opened and behind it appeared the sponge-coloured native rock of the foundations, but more than that. In the stone was set a narrow wooden door, and when he had brought the wall to within two feet of the ground, the figure turned, picked up its lamp and stepped over the remains of the wall. They heard a bolt drawn, then another, and a hole gaped as the door opened inward and the unknown disappeared.

In a moment Forbes and Bowden followed and peered through the open door to see a man stretched upon the ground with his head hidden in his arms, while the newcomer, his back turned towards the watchers, knelt down beside him. A musty odour of tobacco emerged from the hole and the air was very foul.

Then the being spoke under his breath and, as he did so, raised a hand that held a long thin scalpel.

“Who’d have thought you’d got so much life in you, Dick?” said a quiet voice. An arm went up and in another moment the knife would have descended; but Forbes was already over the wall, and with three swift steps he had leapt forward. The unknown shot round to find his arm gripped, while, a second later, Bowden had dragged him from the prone body and flung him backwards. The police had followed instantly and now a glare of light from four torches fell on the countenance of Patrick Rivers.

“You’ve got me then, Samuel!” he said.



'em to make a bed in the cellar and try and get some brandy down his neck and hot bricks to him. Then, Webster, run like hell for the doctor, and you others get a pair of handcuffs and come back."

"You can take me now," declared Rivers quietly. "I shan't fight."

In five minutes the policemen had lifted Richard and carried him away; but Bowden would not allow the prisoner to leave, nor did Forbes trust the elder man with him alone.

He desired to examine the body of his dead friend that seemed to thrust a solitary, beckoning hand from the rotting mass in the corner; but he delayed until Rivers was powerless. He feared that he might seek to destroy himself and carry his secrets with him.

The prisoner showed neither rage nor grief. He was entirely self-possessed.

"I did it all," he said. "All my work, Samuel. You'll never see such a double-dealing devil as me on earth again. 'Double,' I say—that's the word. Just one slip—just one slip, by the will of God, and all's over."

"You'd best to shut your mouth, you man of terror," answered Mr. Bowden, "for everything you say——"

He did not trouble to finish the familiar warning, and Forbes spoke not a word. He could only stare at the great, calm face and steady eyes of—a monster. Something was hidden far behind the mask upon which they gazed; something that neither had ever seen; something, as it ultimately

appeared, that no human being had ever looked upon and lived.

Elsewhere the policemen carried Richard Rivers up the tunnel to Monks, summoned the waiting women and left their unconscious burden with them. A bed of cushions and blankets was hastily made, while Webster had already run for Dr. Colfax; and then Walpole and the other got handcuffs and returned as quickly as they might.

Freed of his obligation to watch the prisoner, Martin Forbes turned to his dead friend. The body of Raleigh Prescott lay under a mass of old tobacco and the manner of his death was instantly to be observed. He had been shot through the back of the head.

Handcuffed, with a man on each side of him, the prisoner stared down at the dead without emotion.

"Look deeper," he directed, and Forbes obeyed—to find beneath the stuff the shrivelled corpse of a small boy.

"I killed him forty years ago," said Patrick Rivers, "when he was ten years old and I was twelve."

CHAPTER XV

FOR two days Richard Rivers remained without consciousness. He had been starved and partially poisoned, not in food or drink, but by the foul air upon which he had lived from the hour of his incarceration. Dr. Colfax fought for him and his own great physical strength and healthy frame assisted him; but the physician was amazed to see what havoc the young man's sufferings had occasioned. He was reduced both to physical and mental weakness. At first memory failed him, then only worked by fits and starts. Intelligence came and went. They had lifted him from the cellar to a bed-room of Monks facing north, for it was the wit of Phyllis that directed his eyes should not look out upon the Storehouse. As time passed and the sweet air and wholesome food cleansed the young man's poisoned blood, his mind grew clear again and he was able to tell his brief story. As yet the course of events had been hidden from him, but after hearing Richard's tale, Inspector Bowden determined to break to him the news of his uncle's crime.

He came on a day after Christmas and found the sick man sufficiently restored to be interested in his own adventure. He had already asked Mrs. Bellhanger more than once if he was

regarded as under arrest, and when, for the second time, she assured him that it was not so, and that his complete innocence had been established, he grasped the fact and it served to aid his return to health. Then came Bowden, and listened to all that Richard could tell him. A stenographer accompanied Inspector Bowden, for Dick's evidence was desired. His Uncle Patrick had already been committed to the Assizes and awaited the capital charge at Melchester gaol.

"I didn't want to bolt," began Richard. "Mrs. Bellhanger will bear me out in that; but I reckoned my uncle knew best and he told me that he believed himself on the track of the truth, so that it would be well worth my while to keep out of the way till he'd found it. Then Phyllis had marked I was being watched by a policeman. She'd spotted him that night, when we went walking after the beginning of the inquest on my poor father. And Uncle Pat said they'd arrest me next day and advised I should run for it and get out of reach. He argued that, though my complete innocence would presently be proved, yet to be locked up meanwhile was a vile thing and must be avoided at any cost. I agreed with him at last and did as he advised. I went down the tunnel, and he came to me where he said he would. His plan was that I should lie low in the Storehouse until the truth was known, and he told me that many years ago, as a lad, he'd found out the secret passage and spent hours poking about in the place and kept his knowledge to himself. He knew of an old smugglers' store in that spot—under the stone stairs

down which he came to meet me—and now he made me lend a hand to pull down the dry-built stone wall at a certain place. I did so and we found a door. It was bolted outside and he opened it and explained I must make up my mind to stop there for twenty-four hours. There was a great heap of old, rotten tobacco in one corner and the place smelled bad.

“This is what my uncle told me as near as I can remember. ‘Here you’re as safe as if you were at the North Pole,’ he said. ‘They’ve taken the watch off the Storehouse now, but I shall run no risks. I shall go and come to you through Monks. For the minute I’ve only got a bottle of beer, which you can drink when you’re thirsty, but tomorrow morning I’ll fetch you a decent lot of food and get a kettle of tea from the farm also. After that you must be patient for twenty-four hours, or maybe thirty-six while I’m at work for you, and by that time I believe I can get information to Forbes that will make you free and safe. Keep your mind calm and have a long sleep—that’s the best you can do.’

“Well, it sounded all right to me and I wound up my watch and reckoned to do as he advised. He was gone in a minute with his lantern and my cap—for a false clue, he said. He told me he’d build up the wall again, so that if the police looked down the tunnel, when they found I hadn’t left Monks, they’d see no sign of me. Then he left and I heard him building up the wall. He’d put the drink on a shelf in the hole where you found me. Soon all was quiet and the stuffy air made me feel

drowsy. Then I had a shock, for my candle-end went out and I was in the dark. I thought I'd drink the beer, then have a long sleep till my uncle came back next morning. I had but a few matches in my box and reckoned to husband them till I might want to see the time later on; so I felt out for the beer, knowing where he'd left it. But, in the black dark, my elbow hit the bottle before my hand reached it, and it fell and smashed on the stone floor. I didn't much care, for I weren't thirsty. So I felt my way to the pile of tobacco and flung myself down on it to sleep."

Richard broke off and Phyllis brought him some barley-water. He was silent for a few minutes after drinking, and Mr. Bowden spoke friendly words.

"We all know what you've been through, Dick. There's a thousand of the people want to see you and shake you by the hand, I can assure you."

The sick man shivered.

"I don't wish anything like that," he said. "I only want peace, and to get away from here till I can breathe again and sleep again without beastly dreams."

"And so you shall, my precious dear," murmured Phyllis. Then he continued.

"I slept and slept and woke up at last feeling pretty bad with a terrible head on me. I counted my matches and found I'd got five. So I ordained to light one. But it failed and that left but four. I lit another, and found it was six o'clock in the morning, so I hoped in an hour or two my uncle would come. Then I thought that, if the door was

open I'd get some better air. I found it and tried to open it, but it wouldn't budge. So I reckoned my uncle had locked it for safety. I laid down again; then I got up and walked up and down. I could go six paces only. I guessed it must be very near noon by now, but didn't burn another match, because I'd only got three left. Nobody came and an eternity seemed to pass and I began to wish to God I'd let the police take me. I got frightened for a bit, but it passed off and I told myself I must keep my nerve. When I reckoned it was evening, I felt fearful thirsty and hungry, too. Yet I couldn't have eaten. I was empty more than hungry. And then a dreadful thing happened. I'd tramped miles up and down, and I flung myself on the tobacco heap and thought I'd try for sleep again. But I dropped heavy on the stuff and felt something hard under me. I thrust in my hand and came upon a bit of cloth and, poking about, I found it was a coat and a pocket, and the hard thing was in the pocket. I jumped up then and felt down and found a revolver in the pocket. And I found a dead man there. I felt his face and I pushed off the tobacco, and then I lighted another match.

"I looked on the man and saw it was Raleigh Prescott. Then I bawled and bawled till I nearly broke my head with the pain of it. But the noise only came back to me and I knew nobody heard. I kept my wits and saw I must save my strength. I felt over Prescott's pockets and found nothing of any use to me. Then, seeing he'd been dead a long time, I covered him up again deep.

“My one idea now was to get away and go to the police. I felt over the door, but there wasn’t a nail upon it. I remembered there were bolts outside, yet couldn’t tell where they were fixed. I tried to find out by running my knife down, but it fixed home tight and there wasn’t a chink. I lost my head a bit then and fired the revolver twice, hoping somebody might hear the noise. It nearly deafened me, but I reckon the sound didn’t go far. Time passed and I lost count of it. I was feeling dreadful bad by now, and my mind wandered, I expect. Anyway, I saw things that weren’t there.”

He stopped again for a moment.

“I don’t remember much more. I was unconscious for a good bit, no doubt. Then I came to again and felt strong as a horse and desperate. I fired the revolver once more and shouted; then I went weak. I thought I’d got two matches left, but I only found one in the box, and I poked about for a long time looking for the other; but I couldn’t find it. Then I lit the one I’d got only to find my watch had run down. But if it had been going, it wouldn’t have told me whether it was night or day.

“Then I knew I was booked, but I couldn’t understand why. I thought a lot about my uncle and I began to see that he must have met with a fatal accident somewhere. I never guessed that he was a wicked man. Then I thought of Prescott again, and then I thought of nothing but Phyllis. My whole mind—what there was left of it—went out to her. I slept again, I think, or fell

unconscious for a long time, and I was surprised to find myself as weak as a mouse when I came to my senses. I laughed at the surprise of feeling my great strength gone. Not much to laugh at; but surprises will often make you laugh even if they're not pleasant. I got up, but couldn't travel about very easy. I'd gone awful cold, too. Once I thought of firing the last shot of the revolver into my head and finishing it. But I fired it into the door quick instead, so as not to have any more temptation that way.

"I felt I was going to die pretty soon now, for I suffered a lot of pain. So I just kept my mind firm on Phyllis so long as I could think any more. I said to myself that I'd die thinking of her and longing for her."

He stopped again and shut his eyes with his sweetheart's arms round him.

"And that's all you remember, my lad?" asked Samuel, who was a little moved, while the girl engaged on the shorthand notes mopped her eyes.

"That's all, Mr. Bowden. I woke up in this bed. And Phyllis was the last thing my wits worked on and the first thing I saw when I was sensible again."

"And the right and proper thing for you to see," she said.

"And now," declared the inspector, "you'll be wanting to hear a bit more, my poor chap."

"No, I shan't—not yet awhile. I only want to bide here and think of nothing at all but the future," replied Richard. "Let the past be forgot."

Then came Dr. Colfax and the patient was

quickly left in peace. But, below stairs, the doctor heard his story and expressed keen satisfaction. He was a psychologist and declared that Richard's narrative confirmed his own scientific convictions.

"A wonderful instance of pure telepathy, my dear Bowden," he said. "A beautiful and elevating proof of how by the will of the Almighty one human mind can react upon another. Pure telepathy saved Richard's life, Bowden."

"You saved him," declared Mrs. Bellhanger. "Nothing would have got him back but for you."

"His body was easily saved," replied the doctor; "but for a while I had fear for his mind. Dick's mind is not his strongest point—never was—but it's clear again now and will grow clearer. He's safe; and it's that imploring, 'save my soul' message he unconsciously sent to Phyllis that dragged her down to listen to the last words he uttered. He was far gone by that time and only spoke in delirium; but the message, with his will power behind it, had gone and was happily answered. Dick's own love for the girl and her responding devotion to him combined to turn the trick. There's only one more interesting thing to know, and that's the truth about Patrick Rivers."

"And unless he tells it, we shall never know," answered Mr. Bowden. "He's dumb as yet; but I believe he'll speak later on. Very calm, they tell me, and well behaved, and silent as the grave."

It was not to the police, however, that the prisoner made any confession. Time sped, and, as a

matter of form, he was directed to plead "not guilty" when he stood his trial. A young barrister defended him and strove to prove the man insane; but every action of Patrick Rivers defied the assertion and alienists could discover no indication of mental infirmity. The man himself threw little light on the proceedings and, apart from the fact that he had certainly attempted to destroy his nephew, there was nothing as yet directly to connect him with the other murders. Yet, when surprised and arrested in the Storehouse, both Bowden and Forbes were able to swear that he had taken the blame for all of them. "All my work," he had said; though, with the information at the command of the Crown, it appeared physically impossible that he could have murdered Michael Bellhanger. If he spoke truth, he had taken five innocent lives and destroyed three adult men and two children; but the closest investigation failed to show any reason for these crimes, if indeed he had committed them, save in the case of his brother, whose heir he had become a few months before the tragedy. And yet the man was not mad. He continued calm, collected, patient and courteous to all who attended him.

He said one curious thing to the judge, when asked if he had any reason to offer why sentence of death should not be pronounced against him.

"I have none," he replied. "I am two men, and the righteous must suffer with the guilty."

Then the archaic words were pronounced, and Patrick Rivers vanished for ever from the sight of his fellow creatures. During the remaining days

of his life he paid attention to the prison chaplain—an old and understanding officer, who had no difficulty in winning his confidence. At first Mr. Rivers showed an inclination to take his secrets with him to the grave, but, as the time drew short, he yielded to the clergyman's entreaty and finally decided that he would tell his story. In the ear of one man alone was he prepared to impart it; but he imposed no future secrecy on the recipient of his confidence.

"I will tell Martin Forbes everything," he said. "If he is allowed to come, he shall hear. Failing him, Mr. Falcon, nobody will ever know."

The Reverend Arthur Falcon proceeded accordingly, and Forbes was quickly directed to a task he undertook with satisfaction. He reached Melchester gaol at the appointed time, and had some speech with the chaplain before he entered the condemned man's cell. Indeed, the aged priest had no little to tell, and was deeply moved by his own acquaintance with the prisoner.

"It is a case unlike any other in my long and sad experience," he said. "One finds parallel examples perhaps in ancient history, but modern science provides new names for conditions that Holy Writ describes more directly and, as I believe, more faithfully. Scientific jargon talks of dual, or divided, or subdivided personalities, Mr. Forbes; but the inspired writers spoke of 'possession.'"

"When this strange being, before sentence of death was pronounced upon him, said that he was two men and not one, he stated what he believed,

and still believes, to be the truth. There is an essential duality; there must be, for the reason that the Patrick Rivers I know, and whom I have studied more closely and strenuously than any criminal within these walls, is quite incapable of committing the least of the horrible crimes that he confesses to. Science now tells us that we are mentally two-fold creatures, victims of a psychic coalition of consciousness and self-consciousness, and the doctors who have heard what I am relating, declare in their modern language, that the conscious mind is made up of sensations and inherited sense-impressions poured into us from our aboriginal, animal ancestors; while self-consciousness—a different thing altogether—is the gift of our developed and highly organised brains—the product of evolution tending, as I believe, ever upwards. Consciousness, you perceive, made the success of animal life possible; self-consciousness, breeding memory and the higher mental qualities, makes the success of human life possible. And those who have studied him hold that in this extraordinary man, the two constituents must have remained apart and been prevented from coalescing in the usual way by some profound defect of constitution beyond our present knowledge to discover.

“The result, say they, is an incongruous mentality. He is not mad—far from it—but he is the victim of his own consciousness, whose primitive instincts the higher nature in him, well developed though it is, was powerless, under existing conditions, to combat. Thus they explain the

astounding horrors he appears to have committed as possible in one of his rather shrinking and sympathetic nature. They say he should not be hanged, but kept alive for the benefit of human knowledge.

“How much easier—how much more in conformity with divine revelation—is it to say that we are faced with a case of ‘possession,’ and that Rivers, for reasons hidden from us, has been afflicted with an evil spirit! For my part I steadfastly believe it, and had the awful truth been revealed by him in his youth to some understanding priest, I make bold to say that Holy Church had long ago exorcised this devil and saved the unhappy man. He is not abnormal. He is a good example of a temperate and orderly person. His love of dumb creatures appears to have been notorious, and many acts of mercy are recorded of him. He would always put himself about for domestic animals and do more than his duty on their behalf.

“However, my own theories are not going to interest you, and I may say that they have not convinced him. His reply is always the same. ‘I knew what my second self was doing,’ he answers. ‘From the first time, as a child of twelve, that I changed into my second self, I knew. For years it never woke up again; but it was there, and when it woke up, I always felt terribly interested, but I never dreaded it, or shirked it, or wanted to escape it. It was myself—the other part of me.’ So he talks; and so he will talk to you, Mr. Forbes. I would not say that he is penitent. He is neither

sorry nor glad, but apparently indifferent. The only thing that interests him vividly is the accident that defeated his infernal scheme at the moment of its fruition. He points out, as one man talking to another, how his second self, as he calls it, failed, and how easily might the failure have been prevented. But he confesses that, just at the finish, his 'second self' became over-anxious and distracted by the difficulties that gathered around him. From the moment that you first suspected him, or he thought you did, he began to lose his grip."

"I did suspect him in a very shadowy fashion at the last, but I hardly realised it myself," said the detective.

"He realised it, however," answered Mr. Falcon. "His senses were supernaturally acute. He anticipated and foresaw and planned in a way that we may much easier associate with a devil than a human being. However, see him now. He is quite calm and contented. There is neither remorse nor regret revealed by him—neither shame for his awful crimes, nor disappointment at his own failure. And not a shadow of fear at what lies before him. It is understood that you shall be left quite alone with him, but a word from you will bring the warders. He is to be handcuffed and chained to his seat so long as you are with him. The time stipulated is one hour."

"I do not fear him; and I'm not much interested in his mental make-up," answered the other. "All I want to find out, Padre, is how on earth he did what he claims to have done."

Two minutes later Forbes met the condemned man. Rivers was sitting chained to his bed, and as he looked upon him, the visitor found himself conscious of that confusion of attributes Mr. Falcon had described. They appeared physically for the man's physiognomy, which had never occupied his close attention, suggested opposing forces. His eyes were gentle and implied a mild and kindly nature; while his mouth and chin indicated asperity and great strength of character. When he spoke, his voice chimed with his eyes and meditative but narrow brow above them. His words were well chosen and uttered with cultured intonation.

Patrick Rivers plunged at once into his narrative.

"Thank you for coming," he said. "You'll be interested to learn what I've got to tell you, Forbes. I want you to understand that you're listening to two men's work rather than one, and I speak now as the harmless, everyday creature you've known. But I've got to tell you the story of a second self. That may puzzle you, yet so it is. My own story everybody has heard—just a busy cow-doctor without any enemies—a commonplace fashion of man doing his duty and coming and going unregarded by his fellow creatures. But the other's different, and if I could explain him, I should do it like this—that nature probably meant for us to be twins—instead of which we were born in one skin—wrapped together closer than any twins, yet two different beings in soul, though one in body. I found out that I was two

in one when I was twelve years old, Martin Forbes, and from the day I killed little Ned Maine, I knew there was a secret life that I should lead, as well as one that the rest of the world would see. I never feared it, I never fought it. It came and went, and I was only glad it didn't take the rudder and turn me into a demon right away. But it was never uppermost all the time. It was more like a visitor than anything. It got hold of me under certain conditions; and when it did, this man, who is sitting here talking to you now, went down before it. When it got me I was changed through and through. I had twice the brain and half the heart. In fact, no heart at all. And, as I say, it first came when I killed that ten-year-old boy forty years ago.

"Why did I kill him? I can tell you. According to my second self there was a very good reason for every stroke I struck. No reason to me who talks to you now; but a sufficient reason for the other Patrick Rivers. First this child, then Norman's little boy, then Michael Bellhanger and my brother and your friend, Prescott—a good reason every time."

"Begin at the beginning, Rivers. How could you find any good reason for killing the little ones?"

"Ned Maine and I were chums. We'd struck up one of those close friendships children will, and we dreamed our dreams. My second self, that grew into a tiger afterwards, was only a kitten then. It peered out playfully. We children thought of the old smugglers and planned how

we'd do all sorts of rare deeds some day and defy the law. We haunted the Storehouse, and it was when climbing the chimney behind the sail-loft for a jackdaw's nest I thought might be there, that I discovered the secret way through the walls. The first great event of my life, Forbes, and for a long time I kept it to myself and planned how I'd use it, and what wonderful things I'd do in years to come. Then Neddy found that I'd got secrets from him, and he sulked and said I wasn't his true friend to hide 'em. By then I'd explored the inner ways of the Storehouse and thrust my nose into a score of strange places. I found holes and corners as a child that I couldn't enter as a man; and among other things I found, when I went wriggling behind the dry built walls with a candle-end, was the big door and the little cave cut out of the rock behind it. A very great adventure; but still I never told a soul. Neddy wouldn't be denied, however, and at last, for kindness and vanity combined, I showed him, after he'd pricked his arm and sworn on his own blood that he'd never tell a living soul. A bit later—in that rock-cut hole, it was one half holiday—we quarrelled, and Neddy said he was going to tell his father all about the hidden tobacco. Then my second self leapt out for the first time in its full fighting horror. I was like a thing suddenly gone mad. I leapt at that wretched child, fastened on his throat and didn't let go till he was gone. Not a pang of fear did I suffer afterwards, nor yet of remorse. I was glad at my strength and rejoiced that I'd shut the traitor's mouth before he had time to tell.

I buried him deep under the great mound of tobacco and knew he'd be safe there for evermore. Then I slipped away out of the Storehouse by the chimney and joined other children at their games in the sand heaps. I didn't go near the place again for a year. My two selves worked apart. I gloried by night in my strength and craft to hoodwink all the grown men seeking that dead child, and, before other people by day, I shed tears—honest tears—for the loss of my little friend. Of course, they never found him, for the secret passage wasn't known, and if they'd gone down it from Monks, they'd never have discovered the door behind the wall.

“Years and years went by and it seemed that my tame half was winning over the savage one. But the other was always there, waiting his time, and when I wanted to marry Susan Bellhanger, and her brother Michael withstood me and secretly helped Simon Whyte of Glebe End against me, he took his life in his hand. I swore then to cut his thread some day, yet I never did so, though I knew year after year the time would come when I might. It was as if the Devil had bidden my second self to wait; and wait it did until there happened the clash between Bellhanger and my brother over the Red Field. And then the revenge came in sight. I could wait like that, patient as a spider, and be my familiar self in the eye of the world, and just jog along—a lonely, disappointed man, working day and night for small money, with nothing better in store and no friends worthy of the name.

“But the fierce fire was always burning out of sight, and then things fell out suddenly, one on top of another, to make it leap into the awful blaze I’m telling about. But there was Ernest Norman’s boy first—little Jacky, that I strangled last spring. We’ll clear him out of the way. Just revenge—that’s all. Of course, I had no quarrel with the child; but the tiger was on the prowl against his father, who’d done me a wicked wrong.

“Norman had a big white cat he thought the world about, and it came home one morning on three legs. It was a very fine creature and it had been poaching, no doubt, and just escaped death from a keeper’s shot by a hair’s breadth. Of course, the fisherman couldn’t afford to engage me, but I heard of his trouble and for kindness and my love of animals and ready wish at all times to save them suffering, I went to see the cat. Twenty-five or twenty-six visits I paid it, and if I’d earned a guinea a visit, I couldn’t have taken more pains to save its life. I exhausted my skill and tried everything I could think upon. But the cat was in an unhealthy state and pretty old, also. It couldn’t stand against the shock and at last I had to tell Ernest that his favourite was going to die despite all my work. It did die, and that man gave out high and low I’d killed it through my ignorance, and that I was a clumsy, careless fool, not to be trusted with any living creature. He defamed me and ran me down to anybody who would listen, and to my certain knowledge he did me harm and lost me work in more quarters than one. And then my savage part took charge, and I

waited to get even with him. I knew where the children played, and I went into the Storehouse unseen a good few times till the opportunity came. At last it did. I got the little boy alone and destroyed him and slipped out of the Storehouse without a soul to see me. Not a pang did I feel after, for I'm not one who was ever sorry for the dead—young or old. When they die, the old end their sorrows and the young escape them. Of course, no mortal man ever thought of me as a babykiller, and I purposely left the child to be found, that his father's pang should be the greater.

“Then I thought, after that, my twin would very soon sink to sleep and not awake maybe for many a long year—if ever he did. There was only Bellhanger waiting, and sometimes I felt minded to spare him. He'd only done what he thought right. Perhaps I would have let the man be, but now there happened amazing and unexpected things to waken up my second self. And it did wake and swept the rest of me away like a straw on a wave. It rose, in all its fearful strength and cunning, and the man that's talking to you would often gaze into the open brain of the other, and gasp with amazement and wonder at such sleepless genius for wickedness and such nerve for carrying it out.

“The tremendous thing that occurred came from my brother, George Rivers. He asked himself to sup with me about Michaelmas last, and he told me that he'd made a new will and left me half his money, and that t'other half must be handled by me and kept for my nephew Richard, if

he proved worthy of it at thirty years of age and not sooner. One moment I was as poor as a church mouse, toiling for a living and leading a terribly arduous life; the next I heard that, when George died, I should be handling something near about twenty-five thousand pounds, half of which would be my own property. My better part bubbled over with gratitude to such a brother, and with great pride to think that he had seen my simple virtues and set me so high in his esteem. I could hardly thank him, and long I praised God for His goodness when he had gone that night.

“But then what happened? The tiger woke, and the tiger talked, and the tiger reminded me that I was but three years George’s junior and that he was a very hale and hearty man quite as likely to outlive me as not. From that time I seemed just to look on and see my other self get to work. He took his time and waited and watched, but the end was sure. It meant so much—a mountain of money like that. Ease and comfort and rest—rest. It was as much the thought of the rest from ceaseless grinding work as anything. No feeling of gratitude or obligation or honour troubled my second self. George’s generosity had signed and sealed his own death warrant. The man was doomed from the moment he told me about his will; and, more than that, his boy was doomed also. My other self meant to have all in due time. It was wonderful, patient scheming—everything planned out to a tick of the clock, and not a loophole for chance to overthrow me. I plotted for possibilities, and when they

didn't fall out, I always had a sure alternative ready to fall back upon. Luck was amazingly with me up to the very end. Chance seemed to open the way to unexpected tricks, just for the pleasure of seeing if I would respond and perform them. And like lightning I did so. I only made one mistake, but that's where something else came in I didn't bargain for. That was at the end. For the minute this is where I stood now."

CHAPTER XVI

PATRICK RIVERS broke off and for a moment was silent. Then he dropped his narrative and strove again to examine origins.

"I'm always seeking to understand it, you know," he said. "I'm always trying to get some reason into what I am, and why I have done what I have done. Perhaps, if we could go back far enough among my forebears, something might be found."

"Maybe," answered Forbes. "Heredity ruins good fortune sometimes, and sometimes bad fortune frustrates good heredity. Professor Karl Pearson says that 'The child is made by its parents. All that the teacher can do is to temper the steel.' But life's a teacher that may mar as well as make. Teachers can't temper the steel if the material to stand tempering isn't there. Get on with your story, Rivers."

"I figure it like this sometimes," replied the other gently. "When the idea of being a man within a man seems too strange, I say 'Perhaps it's like a plant—as though a decent scion had been grafted on to a bad stock, and in course of time the stock had got the whip hand of the scion, as happens in plant life often enough, and strangled out the good thing. Be that as it will, when I

knew my brother's life stood between me and more than ten thousand pounds, and my nephew's life barred the way to ten or twelve thousand more, the best of me went down. I'd been poor all my life and lived hard. The thought of ease, luxury and a fag end of my days far away from England, with the hot sun on my face—it was worth crime. And no good waiting till age came, or maybe my brother changed his mind and made another will.

“I turned it over and kept an open mind; and then came the business of the Red Field, and what I'd got to do grew clear. The tiger part of my brain made me properly wonder, Forbes, for it worked by itself; it flashed thoughts to me; it invented things; it showed me what an amazing headpiece I'd got and never knew it. If my better self had owned that brain, I'd not be here today, the scorn of men; but it was a wicked brain, and only able to create evil. Evil was its god.

“It prompted me to understand the first thing a murderer must look to. He must never be found or proved near his victim at the critical time. It also showed me how, with Michael Bellhanger wanting the field, I could kill the two birds with one stone. And more I saw. Like a lightning flash it came to me that I could saddle my dead brother with the other man's death, and so set inquiry on the wrong track from the beginning. All depended upon little details, and I took every detail in turn and worked them into the big thing, so as the pattern of it, when it came to be figured out, should tell a story that read like truth. My

brother wanted to do the deal on the quiet and Bellhanger was willing. As go-between I named the Storehouse for a certain evening after dark, when it would be empty and the fishermen gone. They agreed, and George asked me to be present. I told him I must be at Melchester that day, and none ever doubted I was there. But I'd been at Melchester on Wednesday, though my house-keeper and everybody else didn't expect me till Thursday night. The trick was to be at the Storehouse before the men arrived in the room behind the sail-loft for their meeting. And I was there. I came back from Melchester on foot by night on Wednesday, and spent Thursday in the secret part of the Store—the part only known to me—the place I'd found when I was a boy of twelve. Everything was ready for my work. I didn't miss one little item. A terrible lot had to happen, but, like a quick-change actor, I'd got all to hand. A ladder was in the chimney—thrust there by me—and down that ladder I came five minutes before the hour fixed for the meeting. I was in my usual working clothes—knickerbockers and jacket. I'd got the bag I always carried—a big one. And in it, among other details, I had the old Derringer and a bottle of chloroform. I'd fixed to shoot the first comer and put out the other with the anæsthetic. And I'd already made up my face very carefully to represent George. That was easy, with his big 'port wine' mark and tight fringe of white whisker. We were of the same size and build, and in the dark I knew I'd pass muster for him anywhere for a minute or two. His short,

gruff voice was easy, too, and I'd only got to speak once, when I asked for a first class return ticket to Yeovil. There remained to get George's coat and hat and trousers—that was all.

“I'd hoped the two men would have come in one at a time; but they must have met in the fore-court and walked up to the sail-loft together. I was hid in the corner of the room behind, and from the moment they entered that chamber to the time I left the Storehouse in my brother's clothes, it wasn't above seven minutes. A hang-man never worked quicker. You see what I had to do, Forbes? A tremendous thing, but all went without a hitch. They passed me, where I stood on one side of the open door, and as Bellhanger struck a match and lighted a candle, I fired and shot him through the back of the head. He'd hardly fallen when I was on my brother, threw him backwards and had the sponge of chloroform to his face. He never knew who'd done it. Four minutes it took to be sure of him; then I slipped off his trousers, coat and hat, carried him to the ladder and dragged him up through the hole in the chimney aloft. There I left him safely hid, to be handled later, and came down, moved the ladder, brushed over the hearth to leave no signs there, slipped on my brother's clothes over my own, and put the revolver and my odds and ends into the bag, along with my looking-glass, grease paints and my own hat. There was nothing left behind but dead Michael Bellhanger and a smell of chloroform. The men had been five minutes late, but it was still a quarter to six and my train

didn't go till the hour. I went down to the forecourt for ten minutes, then hustled across to the station, took my ticket and got into the train as it started. That was the only dangerous part, but no man seeing me in the fitful light of the lamps would have taken me for anybody but my brother. There was a chance that someone at Bridegate who knew him might get in, but I went first class on purpose, for none of George's friends, or mine, would go that class. I had a carriage to myself all the way to Knighton as it happened, and there again chance played my game, for the station-master, seeing George Rivers, as he thought, with his old block hat and 'port wine' face, gave me 'Good-evening.' But he got no answer—a thing not likely to surprise him. I tramped across the platform out of range of the lights, slipped fifty yards down the line into the cutting beyond, saw that the express, coming up from Weymouth and Melchester, was signalled, and made my transformation in exactly two minutes and a half. I'd cleaned my face with a sponge all ready in my bag, put off the whiskers, the trousers and coat, popped all into my bag, and taken from it my own hat and coat. So I stood there Patrick Rivers, in his knickerbockers just as usual, coming back home from his work. I waited till the train was gone and then fell in with Bright, the station-master, who told me he'd just seen my brother. I explained I'd just seen him also, and what was taking George so unexpectedly up the line. Then I took the train on the loop back to West Haven."

Something very like admiration glittered in

the hard eyes of Martin Forbes, but he did not speak.

“The rest of that part of the story you know; and you’ll see, no doubt, how from this point the business of my nephew began to take shape. I had said to myself that, so far as the young man was concerned, I should let a few years pass by before taking his life. Everything was in my favour, because his own lawyer, who was the only man that knew it, would never have believed that George, in a moment of confidence, had told me what was in his will. And nobody was going to be more surprised about the will than I was. But I didn’t know the law, and it came as a shock to me to find that we mustn’t hear the will yet awhile.

“What happened now was that Richard Rivers seemed to thrust his head into affairs, and the moment I saw that, I also saw I might now turn my attention to him at once and tangle him into the mystery to my own future advantage. I didn’t see all the steps in a moment. No mortal man could have done that; but my second self got to work, and accident helped so strangely that it looked as if fate meant to put the rope round Richard’s neck only given a little help from me. And there my better self had a say, for I liked Richard very well and, if you trace back the story, you’ll see how, while I plotted against him with one hand, I seemed to be shielding and defending him with the other. You’ll say I was a wonderful actor; and so I must have been, yet when I stuck up for Richard, I felt every word of it, though at the same time I was piling the circumstantial evi-

dence against him. The forged letter of course I planted at 'The Blue Peter,' when we were beginning our researches into my brother's affairs. It was stuck on the file in the office for some other hand to find; and the same day I put the Derringer into the old iron muniment box and took away the keys of it. The Derringer was one of two I had in a case for a bad debt twenty years ago. Everything remained free and open to me naturally, and I came and went from 'The Blue Peter' when I willed. It was the place I might be expected to visit on behalf of my vanished brother.

"But there was one very important job that had to be done, and I did it the night before your partner came to work on Bellhanger's murder. I'd got to look after George. I found him where I'd left him, put back his own clothes upon him, and carried him along the secret passage in the walls down to the vault. Forty years had passed since I was there, but I remembered, and though I couldn't scramble behind the dry built stones like I did as a boy, I could pull down a hole in them. I did so, and there was the door and there were the old rusty bolts that fastened it. I soon got my brother inside, under the rotting mound of tobacco. Nothing was changed, and there I had thought to let him stop till doom. I bolted him in, piled the wall again, and brushed my footmarks from the dust of the vault outside."

"Was it to convict your nephew that you finally handed out your brother's body that night?"

"Partly, but chiefly for another reason more

important to me. I'm coming to that now. Lawyer Secretan had told Richard that, while he could have supplies, he couldn't hear the will. Until a man's been lost to human knowledge for seven years, the law regards him as alive, you see, and Secretan, believing my brother an innocent man and the victim of circumstances and perhaps not dead at all, refused to let Dick know anything about his private affairs. So I had to begin thinking again, and I saw that a bold move had got to be taken. I must let the world know George Rivers was dead, and I must also make the world think that his son had a pretty deep hand in it. Dick, you understand, was a dead man in my sight, anyway; but if I could doom him right and regular through the Law, so much the better it seemed to me then.

"What happened next you'll remember, Forbes. For a time all thoughts of George Rivers were forgotten before the startling fact that your partner had opened the tunnel from Monks, gone down it and never come out again so far as his fellow man could tell. I wasn't troubling about Prescott. I only knew that he made no progress in his inquiry; but I did not think the tunnel was going to be opened, and it was the fact that he performed this operation in secret and so surprised me, that cost him his life. I'd gone forward quietly spinning the web for my nephew, because, up to that time, it seemed to me the cleverest thing possible to let Richard fall into the hands of the law. So I took my dead brother's little note-book and made the appointment to meet

Richard and copied his writing and set it down for November the twenty-third. I also took the tarpaulin and the length of new rope from 'The Blue Peter'—a thing easy enough for me, who was in and out all the time. My plan was presently to reveal the corpse of my brother—exactly how and when I didn't decide till later. But I meant it to be found, and for it to look as though George's son knew all about it. On the date I'd set in the little book, I went into the Storehouse at a late hour, took the rope and tarpaulin below, pulled down the dry built wall and opened the door behind it. And while I was working there your partner, coming down the tunnel from Monks, surprised me. I dreamed of no such thing, of course—hadn't a shadow of a notion he was in the tunnel—and you may judge what I felt when, kneeling by my brother, strapping him into Dick's old tarpaulin, I was conscious out of the tail of my eye that someone outside had marked me.

“What happened was this: Prescott saw my light, no doubt, so soon as he emerged from the tunnel, and he saw it came from a hole in the wall near the steps. He got as close as he dared, looked in and marked me at my work. Then, believing himself unseen, he crept away and, in another moment, would have been up the tunnel with his fatal knowledge. It was a matter of seconds, and almost before his back had turned I was behind him. I always carried the second of the old pair of Derringers, and I had it then, and, knowing it was my life or his now, I leapt out behind Prescott and fired at close

range just as he heard me and meant to fire himself. But he was too late. He was dead in five seconds after he'd found me, and half a minute afterwards I'd got him into the hole and under the tobacco. I took the torch that had fallen out of his hand when I fired, and then I searched him and found another torch and a revolver. The revolver I left, but both torches I removed. I knew now how I stood. Others at Monks must be aware that the detective had gone down the tunnel, and presently, when he didn't reappear, they would hunt the tunnel and find the secret way and the entrance into it by the chimney in the room behind the sail-loft. All that would soon now be given away and any chance of visiting the old smugglers' hiding-place in the vault might not offer again for me. That the searchers would find the cave behind its oak door I didn't expect, but there'd be no more chances to visit it again safely myself for a long while. Prescott didn't matter. He would be safe where he was, but my dead brother did matter. He had to be found before his will could be proved. I might have left George Rivers to be discovered then and there; but I determined to postpone that event. Therefore I dragged him up to my other hiding-place—under the roof of the Storehouse. The main passage from Monks I knew must now be discovered; but the other, also starting in a chimney and ending under the tiles of the Store, would still probably remain a secret and, even if it were discovered, the revelation of my brother's death could only be hastened. I made all safe in the vault, built up

the wall very carefully, and carried my brother's body away. After some mighty labour, I got him up into the roof. Ample leisure was given me, though at the time I could not be sure of that. In the event, however, the disappearance of Raleigh Prescott was not reported by Mrs. Bellhanger until the resumed inquest upon her husband, which took place during the following day. Then, as you'll remember, Bowden and a policeman explored the tunnel and the search for your partner began. It was I that pointed out the gravity of his disappearance. Then, that night, you came in, Forbes, and set to work to find out what had happened to your friend. I was always sorry for you, and sorrier still for him."

"Never mind your sorrow," answered the other. "Tell on."

Patrick Rivers changed his position and the irons clanked upon his legs and hands.

"You know a good bit of the rest," he said. "You set to work and the mystery thickened. You saw no light and I plotted; and chance willed that a suggestion, I little thought would go through, satisfied Bowden and yourself. It was a move in a game to me—just an experiment—when I proposed to Bowden that you should give out the Storehouse was going to be pulled down. I scarcely thought you'd reckon it much use; but you did, and then the tiger in me sported, Forbes. As a cat will sport with a mouse, so a tiger will sport with a man. I knew where you kept your watch in the Store, and I'd heard from Inspector Bowden just where you had been in the secret pas-

sage when the voices of the police reached you. So that was the next move—another experiment.”

“The voice in the wall speaking, as I fancied, to dumb Joe Baggs?”

“Yes. I guessed that if you heard something like a definite intention on the part of the unknown man, you believed hid in the Storehouse, to get out the morning of Sunday, you’d believe your plot—my plot—to pretend to pull down the Storehouse—had gone home and the rascal meant to bolt. It was a bit wild, but you fell for it—naturally, after hearing the voice. You could trust your own ears, and there surely was cast-iron evidence. Somebody had planned with Baggs to be off by boat and take another with him. My own voice is small and don’t travel far; so I made it very loud and distinct and slow, and spoke from down in my chest; and I imitated the noises that Joe makes, which was easy enough. Your imagination did the rest, and in your mind’s eye you saw two men behind the wall and heard them give themselves away.”

“How did you get into the Storehouse that evening unseen?”

“Easily—by way of Monks. Monks was empty and locked up. The Bellhangers weren’t coming back till Sunday afternoon. The hole in the cellar was blocked with timbers easy to move from inside. Dusk was down and I slipped in with no eye upon me. I knew where you were to a yard, because I’d been to see you there more than once, and I knew you wouldn’t be gone. If you were gone, no harm would be done; but I soon heard

afterwards from Bowden that the voice had reached you. I was in the secret, of course, being the man who had invented the whole plot for you. After I'd spoke, I went back quick to Monks, made good in the cellar, and was out and away unseen through a back window in a few minutes. It sounds difficult; but what's hard, if you let your mind wander, or your spirit doubt, is easy with such power to concentrate and nerve to act as I had!"

Forbes nodded.

"That's true," he said.

"Everything went right and my good luck still held to me. So good was it, that some men might have feared they were being fooled to the top of their bent, only to be tumbled down in the end. But I feared nothing as yet. It looked as if fortune helped the brave. First there was the invitation to be one of the watchers on that crucial Sunday morning, and then a still greater bit of sheer, amazing luck thrown at me and seized and made instant use of. But I'll come to that.

"The night arrived and the thing I hoped to do proved easy instead of difficult. I was given the post in the fore-court. Each post, as you know, lay well out of sight of the other posts; but my post was most secure of all. No eye could see me there, and after you'd been your last round and returned to Bowden behind the old boat, on the south sea-facing side of the Store, I moved. Your back hadn't more than turned before I was in the Storehouse, up the secret way to the roof and ready to hand my dead brother down. The rope

was there already attached. I put on my black mask, looked out into the dim light, saw you and Samuel crouching in your hiding-place, and knew you had seen me. Then I lowered George Rivers under your noses and flung the rope after him. Five minutes I took to get back, because there wasn't any hurry. I'd read your thoughts and knew you'd expect the unknown man to follow his victim. I pictured you just as you were, waiting one each side of that door for me to come down to my prey; but long before you were tired of waiting, I was back in the fore-court guarding the steps up to the sail-loft."

"My God! Yes, I see."

"Then came the grand stroke of pure luck—deserved, maybe, if triumphant wickedness deserves reward—but unworked for by me—just a 'bonus,' Forbes, on my devilish craft. Richard, at your will, had been kept very carefully in the dark about the night's work, and he didn't know more than an infant what was doing.

"And here I may show how I began to see my error with regard to him. I'd got Dick landed, high and dry, and in it up to the eyes; but then I saw I'd been making a great error in that matter; because the Law, which must soon take him now, would keep him safe—*safe from me, too!* Yet, as it happened, even that turned to good, because just my work—to make him suspected—now demanded a counter-stroke, to save him from the custody of the Law and get him into my hands instead. I knew they'd never hang him, and so his money would be safe from me; for that's a

strange side to criminals, Forbes—they'll strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. I never thought how easy it would be to rob him of his money, only how easy it would be to rob him of his life. The Law wouldn't destroy him, so I must; and as I'd took his side against the Law from the first, nothing was easier than to follow it up, and go on fighting the Law, and help him to escape, or make him think that I meant to do so. He trusted me to think and act for him. And that was just what the police expected of me, and couldn't blame in their hearts either when I did it.

"The plot was always kept fluid and open. Things that happened altered details from day to day, for half the business of a bad man is to make his work look right and honest and reasonable and consonant with the rest of the world's honest work. I never planned far ahead, but was always awake to leap at every chance that offered, or make new openings where there were none."

"Get on with it, Rivers."

"The stroke of pure luck was the next thing that happened, when Bowden took me along with him to Monks, where you sent him to see that all was right there. Not Samuel himself was more astonished than I to see Richard coming down the hill. It looked as if he couldn't keep out of the game. And when Bowden bade me take the key and go ahead, the rest flashed into my mind in a moment. I was still for incriminating Dick at that time, so I went in with the key, threw up a window at the back—the same I'd been through myself—and then opened the way into the tunnel.

I wondered much all the while what had taken Richard to the empty house at that hour; but he'd told Bowden the truth, of course, and there was his letter waiting for the girl to find next day. Just luck, and that bit of evidence told perhaps more than all the rest."

"I never believed him guilty. Character was stronger than evidence in his case, as it is sometimes."

"A good word, Forbes. And now there's only the attempt to murder Richard left to tell you about. But as you've heard his story, no doubt, I needn't waste your time with that. The problem was easy: to make it appear that my nephew, now a shadowed man, had given the police the slip and got clear with my help. I had to make a story and have it ready, in case it should be wanted; and it was—when Phyllis Bellhanger heard Dick's raving and came to tell me so. That was the biggest shock I suffered from first to last, for if she'd really heard his voice, then I knew my plan, to put him out of his misery quickly, had failed. But the story was ready and the details arranged for; and when Phyllis learned that her lover had taken a boat and was off to Weymouth and the Channel Islands, I knew she was satisfied; but I knew her mother was not. And more I knew. I understood, since that girl had been called to the tunnel by no human voice, that my luck had turned. I knew it deep in my heart, Forbes; but I fought to the last and only gave in when the end came. Like a machine wound up, I had to go on; but I felt no great surprise when you clutched my arm in the

cave and I saw all was lost. Yet the mistake was mine. My own error—I that thought I could make none!”

“You mean in going back to him?”

“Yes; I mean that. I never meant to come near him again. If he’d drunk the beer, he’d have been dead two minutes afterwards.”

“He meant to, but thrust out his hand and broke the bottle in the dark.”

“I guessed as much. And if I’d not gone back to him, nothing would ever have been discovered. He lay in the shadow of death—unconscious—his troubles ended. That’s all—unless you want to ask any questions. But my thread was spun—not his. The Lord sent me back to my fate and to save Richard’s life instead of to end it.”

“What about Ernest Norman’s boat?”

“That had to disappear, of course. After I’d locked Richard in and put back the loose-built wall, I went down through the Storehouse and dropped his cap, taken from him for the purpose. It was just the turn of the tide, and I launched Norman’s sailing boat and another. I towed Norman’s boat half a mile to sea, made fast all her gear, then drove an oar through her bottom, sank her, and paddled back.”

“That’s all there is to it, then?”

“For you, yes.”

The detective rose to go. Elsewhere the Governor of the Prison, the Chief of Police, the High Sheriff of the County and other interested officials awaited him.

“Can you say you forgive me?” asked the pris-

oner mildly, his eyes lifted to the detective's face. But Martin Forbes was in no forgiving mood.

"Ask the God that made you to forgive—I never will," he answered and was gone.

Three days later Inspector Bowden strolled up to Monks Farm. He had seen Forbes at Bridegate and learned all particulars of the confession.

Mrs. Bellhanger greeted him.

"How's the boy?" he asked.

"Out in the garden with Phyllis—his first walk. Weak as a kitten, but all right. He won't go a step where his eyes can see the Storehouse. He's only wishful to be gone."

"The black flag flew for 'The Monster' at eight this morning. They woke him at five minutes to and put him to sleep for evermore a minute after the hour."

"I know. I'm keeping it from Richard. He never asks—time enough for him to hear."

"I thought he'd like the fearful story. I've got it all from Forbes. Patrick Rivers let every bit out—a devilish thing, Ma'am."

"Leave it—leave it, my dear man. I looked out of the window a minute afore you came along, and I saw the boy, with his arm on my girl's shoulder, tottering along to see the first primroses. And I said a verse from a Psalm, Bowden—just a verse we often hear, but never think of the beauty."

"And what might that be, Mrs. Bellhanger?"

"Then are they glad because they are quiet; so He bringeth them into their desired haven.'"

"And that won't be West Haven, I reckon," said the Inspector.

“No—none of us can live here any more. We’re going far ways off—so like as not to Canada.”

“A very natural idea, Ma’am,” said Samuel.
“ ’Tis haunted ground for the three of you. And so it will be for me.”

